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(formerly "Lutheran World")

Yoshiro Ishida
Harding Meyer
Edmond Perret

The History and Theological Concerns of World Confessional Families

August 1979

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Introduction

This volume of *LWF Report* contains an important and timely exploration of one aspect of the ecumenical movement: the role of the World Confessional Families (WCFs) and their relation to one another and to the World Council of Churches. Volume 3 of *LWF Report* discussed the relation of the LWF to the WCC; this volume examines the history and basic theological concerns of the World Confessional Families from 1957 to the present time - a period in which the WCFs have been meeting together and exchanging ideas and information.

Dr. Harding Meyer, Strasbourg, traces the major theological concerns consistently expressed by some, or all, WCFs. The history of the Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families is described by Dr. Edmond Perret, presently Chairman of that Conference and General Secretary of one of the oldest WCFs, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (founded in 1877). Dr. Meyer's paper was presented at the October 1978 joint World Council of Churches/World Confessional Families Consultation in Geneva, Dr. Perret's at the May 1977 meeting of the Conference of Secretaries of WCFs in Rome.

The question of the role of the World Confessional Families has taken on added significance due to the fact that the major confessions or communions are in dialog with one another. The involvement of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches in these dialogs has signaled an intensification of interaction between a number of world communions, a development which characterizes an important part of the ecumenical movement in our day.

We considered it important that these two major reflections on the life, work, and meaning of World Confessional Families be presented to readers of *LWF Report*. The publication of these papers is also intended to serve the Conference of Secretaries of WCFs, and copies are being made available to all Confessional Families as well as to their constituencies.

As an introduction, we asked Dr. Yoshiro Ishida to discuss the question of the confessions and confessionality of the church. While he has done this from the point of view of the Lutheran churches and the LWF, Dr. Ishida, a Japanese theologian, brings his own unique approach to this question. He comes from a church that could not immediately share the concerns of the churches of the 16th century confessions and yet finds in these confessions the direction to confess Christ today. He tries to show, as World Confessional Families and World Communions will insist, that concern for historic confession is not merely a looking back on history, but a resource for the witness of the church in the contemporary situation.

Many believe that the question of confessionality is one to which attention should be given as churches and communities of churches take up increasing contact and draw more closely to one another. The danger of narrow confessionalism, ever present in a community that finds its identity in specific historic confessions, must be recognized. The reconciling of the rich diversity of traditions within the Christian church is an activity that many believe will serve to manifest the unity of Christ's church.

Carl H. Mau

YOSHIRO ISHIDA

CONFESSIONS AND CONFESSIONALITY OF THE CHURCH

I.

On the occasion of the Dar es Salaam Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (1977), Lutherans were once again urged to find new forms of dynamic confessionality in their search for identity. This time, their confessional identity was at stake, challenged more than ever before by pressing political and social issues. "Under normal circumstances Christians may have different opinions in political questions", stated the Assembly. "However, political and social systems may become so perverted and oppressive that it is consistent with the confession to reject them and to work for changes." The statement continued: "We especially appeal to our white member churches in southern Africa to recognize that the situation in southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system."[1]

With the entry of the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP - Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) into LWF membership (1952), there was an attempt within the LWF to reinterpret the Lutheran attitude to the historical confessions. This anticipated the current acceleration of this World Confessional Family's continuing attempts to clarify its position, in order to avoid a notion of confessional identity which is static and not oriented to a specific time. Such developments have been necessitated by the Federation's increasing ecumenical involvement, as well as by its ministry in witness and service in the midst of the world. While placing a strong emphasis on dynamic modifications in the confessional and doctrinal identity, Lutherans have been pursuing the question what really constitutes a *status confessionis* which leads the church to manifest its confessionality.

The church needs a confession that cannot be reduced to the mere momentary act of

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confessing. At the same time, no confession can, or should, be formulated merely for the sake of possessing a confession. In the case of the Batak Confession, a deep conviction of the existence of *status confessionis* on the part of the HKBP validated their doctrinal statement as a confession in 1951. The preface to the Confession states: "A confession of faith is necessary to establish our faith and to oppose heresy.... So it is that the church in every age must renew and reform the confessions rather than close its eyes and simply rely on earlier confessions. ... Because of pressures upon the church from every side, we must at this time arouse our thinking to confront the religions and teachings around us."[2]

The *status confessionis* is essentially related, therefore, to the responsible identity of the church and the process of its embodiment in a particular time and place. It is not, however, simply a reflection of environmental conditions, such as the contemporary national and socio-religious life-styles and culture of the people, but rather a consequence of the church's serious deliberations on the integrity of its faith and life in encountering challenging conditions. This integrity may be demonstrated by the church's identity as a responsible community in its "Christonomous" self-understanding (as the 1972 Hanover Assembly of the LWF termed it[3]) and by its missionary perspective.

II.

"Who is Jesus Christ?" is the kind of question which recurs, beyond doctrinal arguments and confessional articulations, as one lives a corporate life in the new community in Christ. This question emerges pointedly whenever the Christian community is challenged by the issues confronting it. It is not simply a matter of a Christological confession, but rather of "confessing" Christ today through the totality and commitment of one's life.

Therefore, "confessing" must be clearly distinguished from a mere confessional position or attitude and, more particularly, from a rigid and stagnant adherence to confessional writings or confessionalism. Confessing is an act (*confessio in actu*) by which one proclaims Jesus as Christ the Lord (Rom. 5:1), and thus assumes a distinct identity as Jesus' disciple (Phil. 3:9), with deep-felt thanks and praise (Eph. 1:13-14). This is what has been termed "confessionality" in

the past. It has, however, tended to be reduced to confessionalism.

The fact that we have confessions to which we formally subscribe does not necessarily guarantee that our church is a truly confessing church. Rather, our churches have often been prevented from being part of an active confessing church for the very reason that they do have the confessions.

Subscription to a confession certainly makes a church a confessional, but not necessarily a confessing, church. The Lutheran church is by nature confessional, but it is not always a confessing church. It is of vital importance that the difference between these two terms be clearly recognized. The constant query should be whether a confessional church continues to be a confessing church by virtue of the fact that, through its confessions, it is constantly motivated and enabled to renew its confessing nature.

A church's possession of certain historical confessions does not bind it to a timeless truth, a "deposit of faith", which precludes any future acts of confessing; rather it frees the church to confess *in actu*, as originally intended by the confessions. George Forell says: "Faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions means to apply them with imagination and precision to the present-day attack against the humanity of human beings in the relationship to God."[4] Thus historical confessions should lead to a dynamic act of confessing in the present, and should not become mere doctrinal law.

III.

Confessing is distinguished from mere confessionalism by the church's call to mission and its missionary awareness. Confessing is an act which awakens the church to assert its own identity and missionary perspectives in the world.

"Confessing Christ today" indeed leads one to proclaim without hesitation the *regnum Christi*, the sovereign lordship of Christ over all things. This proclamation involves a courageous fight against oneself and against all "principalities" of this world (Eph. 6:12). At the same time, one is motivated to account to anyone who wants to know the reason for the hope that is in one (1Peter 3:15). The

finality of Jesus Christ in universal history is, therefore, to be viewed in his triumph over what the New Testament describes as "distance", "enemy", and "judgement". Thus, a church, to be the church of Jesus Christ in this world, is called to a realistic, dynamic, and existential act of confessing. This constitutes its confessionality. As demonstrated by the ecumenical creeds and the 16th century confessions, the outgoing, missionary perspective of confessionality has always been primary.

Lutherans confess in faith the revelation of the whole Word of the triune God. The Lutheran confessionality, while emphasizing the church's proclamation of God's gospel for eternal salvation, is equally concerned with the advocacy of God's law for earthly justice. What distinctly emerges in the act of confessing is the capacity to distinguish between God's law and God's gospel and to interrelate them dynamically. "If only the law were proclaimed, the result would be either pride or despair. If only the gospel were proclaimed, it would necessarily become 'cheap grace'. Consequently, while law and gospel must be distinguished, they must never be isolated from each other."[5]

"Confessing Christ today" implies that we confess to God's action through his law and gospel. "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph. 1:9-10)

Through this act of confessing Christ today, the church's social and political concern and involvement becomes legitimate. At the same time, we are reminded by the Lutheran confessional heritage of our inextricable, yet self-critical, solidarity with the world and of the need to avoid what has been called "the mono-christological approach".

One position of this approach would tend to overemphasize the converging movement, i.e., bring everything together under Christ as head to the extent that negative elements, including some of the issues emerging from "root causes" of socio-political injustice, are ignored. Another position would be to let the christonomistic idea of revelation become so predominant that there would scarcely be room for discerning God's activities in the world apart from his special revelation

through the event of Jesus Christ.

Such mono-christological approaches have problems in common. They ignore the two-fold revelation of God: through the law of creation and through the gospel of God's grace. This results in a confusion between law and gospel.

We are certainly privileged in our common heritage of the Lutheran confessions. This, instead of binding us to "doctrinal rigidity", helps us to overcome the great distance separating us from a dynamic confessionality and, as the Lutheran confessions originally intended, to cope with the challenges of society and the world. This confessionality provided by the confessions should prompt us at any time, and in each place, to dynamically confess and powerfully proclaim the good news of God's liberation of human beings through, and in the event of, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One who confesses Christ today, while joining forces with those who work for humanitarian causes, also participates with those confessing the same Christ in God's eternal purpose of uniting everything in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10). This results in the unity of those who confess as the people of God (1Cor. 1:10) and in their apostolate or mission to the world, bearing witness to the unity and community (John 17). Unity and mission are not only inseparable; they also have their roots in the church's confessionality. Confessing, ecumenical in itself, is missionary in its dynamics.

IV.

Because the church is a confessing community, its confessionality, authority, and integrity are related to its concern and care for others being an integral part of its mission and ministry. The church's confessionality is ultimately an essential element of its relevance and witness. The credibility of the church's confessionality is challenged as the church becomes involved in social and political issues.

Thus, an increasing awareness of the church's socio-political functions and responsibilities, as well as of its advocacy for justice and peace, must become part

of the total response of the confessing community. Christians are meant to be a confessing and witnessing community, not simply within the limits of, or even for the sake of, political expedience, but for the sake of the gospel and in radical obedience and full response to its proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

The confessionality evident throughout the *Book of Concord* clearly points to the need for speaking specifically yet universally, concretely yet eschatologically, to the problems and conflicts in a given situation. This confessionality can and should help to overcome the ever-emerging mission docetism which develops sophisticated mission theories, but does not really actively involve the people of God in mission. At the same time, this same confessionality demonstrates the ecumenical horizon and dynamics of tradition that help to avoid the particular historicism and provincialism which often prevail in mission strategy. Only if the church is alert and active in its confessing, can its mission achieve its full dimension.

V.

As we approach the year 1980, efforts are being made in Lutheran circles to reread the Augsburg Confession in contemporary contexts. But the question also emerges whether there is not a need to rewrite, rather than simply reinterpret, the Confession. The issue at stake is not merely to produce possible new confessions, but to make every church aware of the need to assert its responsible identity within its missionary perspective. Whether historical confessions like the Augsburg Confession can and should serve the Christian community to this end is a question in urgent need of discussion.

This would not, in fact, be anything extraordinarily new in the situation faced by the churches in Asia and Africa. But this whole issue has often been overshadowed by the influence of rigid confessionalism over against theological unionism and ecumenical activism. The issue has also been obscured by the fact that churches in those parts of the world have been preoccupied with their historical heritage, even though this heritage can at best be regarded as an ecumenical link and a safeguard against their isolation.

On the other hand, when churches embody their responsible identity in their own situation, they find it helpful to be part of their own confessional family. The corporate endeavors and mutual assistance of the family will benefit these churches as they assume their local missionary tasks; for within the family the churches are able to share not only the experiences which come out of their respective situations, but also those that stem from the confessionality they hold in common. However, a particular historical confession, on which the members of that family base their confessionality, should not be a binding law; such a family should rather remain a "movement" within the larger household of God.

VI.

We are being increasingly reminded that all churches in each place share responsibility for asserting their identity, an identity firmly grounded in dynamic confessionality. It is no longer conceivable that "younger" churches should await instructions or directions from the "mother" or "older" churches. By virtue of their aloofness from long accumulated historical and ecclesiastical prejudices, their disinterest in mere doctrinal debate, and their possession of an uninhibited but missionary eagerness, the churches in Asia and Africa may now be in a better position to make a responsible contribution to the advance of the ecumenical undertaking so needed in the world today.

NOTES

1. *In Christ - A New Community: The Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, June 13-25, 1977*, ed. Arne Sovik (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1977), p. 180.

2. *Confession of Faith of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant: Approved by the Great Synod at Sipoholon, November 28-30, 1951* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 3.

3. *The Proceedings of the Second Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Hanover, Germany, July 25 - August 3, 1952*, ed. Carl E. Lund-Quist (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1952), p. 136.

4. "The Formula of Concord and the Teaching Ministry", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, 1977, p. 45.

5. *Lutheran Identity: Final Report of the Study Project, "The Identity of the Lutheran Churches in the Context of the Challenges of our Time"* (Strasbourg: Institute for Ecumenical Research, 1977), p. 18.

HARDING MEYER

BASIC THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF WORLD CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES

Introduction

1. The following paper by Edmond Perret describes the close relationship between the life and work of the World Confessional Families (WCFs) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), a relationship which is particularly close as far as the Conference of Secretaries of WCFs (designated in the following as WCF Conference) is concerned. This Conference, whose aim is to establish a comprehensive link between the large confessional families, could not have been conceived and initiated without the WCC. The first WCC General Secretary, Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, played an important role in the organization of the annual meetings during the first 10 years of the Conference's existence, and, in the following years, the same may be said of Dr. Lukas Vischer, Director of the WCC Faith and Order Secretariat. Throughout the years, the agenda of the Conference has, to a great extent, been determined by questions and suggestions coming from, or channeled through, the WCC.

2. In short, throughout the 20-year history of the WCF Conference, there has been evidence of a sense of fellowship between the WCFs and the WCC, a fellowship which is confirmed rather than questioned by certain differences of character and by different emphases in their activities and aims, and which has even stood up to occasional tension. The question of finding an adequate form for the relationship between these two entities has therefore been one of the most important and - both directly and indirectly - recurring topics with which the Conference has had to deal. It has repeatedly been said that there is, or should be, a "partnership", a "consultative" or - more recently - "mutually supportative" relationship.

3. The primary intention of this paper is not to analyze the relationship between

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the WCFs and the WCC, but to take a look at the theological aspects of the life and work of the WCFs themselves. However, as the final part attempts to show, a description of the distinctive and specific theological concerns of the WCFs can indicate the degree to which the WCC and the WCFs belong together - because of, not in spite of, their differences - and thus complement, correct, and support one another.

4. One may say that, in one way or another, WCF Conferences reflect the entire work and life of each WCF. As we know, the exchange of information in the form of reports on important events, projects, and developments in each WCF is one of the main items on each agenda[1]. The WCF Conferences have, however, never limited themselves to a mere exchange of information. From the outset, they have accepted it as their task to reflect on questions which arise within the WCFs themselves, or which are directed at them as a group from outside. It is, above all, when they challenge each other, or are challenged as a group, that the theological aspects of their life and work become most visible.

5. From the beginning, the WCF Conferences have had to deal with the intrinsic nature of the WCFs and their specific tasks in the context of the contemporary structures of Christianity, a Christianity which is taking the ecumenical idea more and more seriously and is being shaped by it to an ever increasing degree. This has often been termed the question of the *raison d'être* of the WCFs.

6. But this appears to be a rather unfortunate turn of phrase since it gives the impression that the WCFs are structures or organizations which can be created and abolished at will. According to the WCFs' self-understanding, this would be a superficial point of view. Basic and living spiritual realities are involved, and these realities are seen to find organizational and structural expression - an expression which is open to modification and change - in the WCFs. Thus, a radical questioning of, or - inversely - a conscious attempt to justify, the existence of the WCFs, constitute two equally inadequate points of view.

7. In the course of the WCF Conferences, two attempts have been made (1962 and 1967) to formulate something approximating a "definition" of the WCFs. The "working definition" of 1962 reads:

"We understand the term 'confessional bodies' as used in the Constitution of the World Council of Churches, to mean the organizations which represent families of churches. While each of these bodies has its own specific conception of the nature of the link that binds its member churches together and of its role in the total ecumenical life of the churches, these bodies have this in common: a) that their member churches share together not only the general tradition which is common to all Christian churches, but also specific traditions which have grown out of spiritual crises in the history of the Church; b) that they desire to render witness to specific convictions of doctrinal or ecclesiological character which they consider to be essential for the life of the whole Church of Christ."[2]

8. The second attempt at a definition, made at the October 19-20, 1967, WCF Conference, runs as follows:

"The term 'World Confessional Families' is used here for the various Christian traditions taken as a whole. Each World Confessional Family consists of churches belonging to the same tradition and held together by this common heritage; they are conscious of living in the same universal fellowship and give to this consciousness at least some structured visible expression."[3]

9. Although both of these attempted definitions are helpful in so far as they emphasize important points, neither has been wholly satisfactory. It may therefore be significant that no further definition has been attempted in the last 10 years. The broadening of the spectrum of churches represented at the Conferences (Orthodox, Roman Catholic) has doubtless been an additional complicating factor.

10. Instead of using an abbreviated definition to build an inadequate roof under which, in the end, no one finds a proper place, the recent trend seems to have been to talk about the life and work of the WCFs in a more descriptive manner. This is certainly more adequate. Efforts are being made to present the specific dimensions or aspects of those spiritual realities for which the WCFs are the organizational or structural expression.

11. Three aspects, representing three basic concerns of all WCFs, become especially apparent: a) a concern for *legitimate diversity* within the one catholic

church and the one apostolic faith; b) a concern for the *historical continuity* of Christian faith and life; and c) a concern for Christian fellowship as a *universal fellowship* transcending national, ethnic, and cultural barriers and boundaries.

12. These three theological aspects, or basic concerns, seem to have dominated the life of the WCFs and determined their work. In the following pages, I will give a brief description of each of them, and - under the heading "Implications" - attempt to give some examples showing the extent to which each aspect shapes the life and work of the WCFs.

THE ONE APOSTOLIC FAITH AND THE ONE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXPRESSED AND MANIFESTED IN VARIOUS FORMS

13. That the various WCFs are completely different from one another - so different, in fact, that it has not yet been possible to find an adequate and satisfactory designation for them (see paras. 33 to 35, below) - has repeatedly been commented upon[4]. This is undoubtedly true, though it has occasionally been overemphasized. The question remains, however, how to interpret this diversity. The working definition of 1962 attempts to do this: It accepts the diversity, or peculiarities, of the various WCFs as specific contributions to "the life of the whole Church of Christ"[5].

14. This interpretation and viewpoint has been criticized as being too "static" and reminiscent of some dubious kind of "jigsaw-puzzle"[6]. Others are of the opinion that it is "pre-ecumenical" or "ecumenical formalism", and have said that, in order to gain a proper understanding of the WCFs - and particularly of their diversity -, it would be necessary to take the statements of the Creed as a basis: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit ... in one holy catholic and apostolic Church".[7]

15. The latter certainly seems to be a more suitable approach, and it appears to have found widespread acceptance as a description of the WCFs' self-understanding. While not denying that, particularly in their diversity, the individual WCFs have a "specific contribution" to make to the life of the church as a whole, it is now stressed that the individual WCFs, or their member churches, each constitute a

specific manifestation of the *one* catholic and apostolic church.

16. At the April 1962 Conference, the Anglican Bishop, Stephen F. Bayne, recalled that the Lambeth Conference of 1930 had defined the Anglican Communion as "a fellowship, within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" consisting of dioceses and regional churches which possess particular "characteristics in common"[8]. Similarly, at the same Conference, the representative of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Rev. Lewis S. Mudge, said: "A confessional church, as we understand it, is a catholic church having a particular theological discipline: that is to say a church which confesses its faith to the world in particular forms of order and doctrine."[9]

17. In a preparatory volume for the LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam (1977), it is stated: "Lutheran churches consider themselves part of the one, holy, catholic Church. The apostolic witness is the basis of their life and proclamation and they use the creeds of the ancient Church to confess their own faith. At the same time, however, they constitute a distinctive fellowship of churches, united by common confessions and a common history. The LWF is an organized instrument and an expression of this fellowship, transcending the boundaries of countries, nations and languages."[10]

18. Presumably all WCFs share this view in principle. *They understand themselves (or their member churches) as specific manifestations of the one catholic and apostolic church, thus giving expression to the fact that the one catholic church and the one apostolic faith are alive in diverse worldwide manifestations.*

19. The Second Vatican Council helped this view to find acceptance also in the Roman Catholic Church[11]. The famous declaration of this Council, that the one, holy catholic and apostolic church "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church, could probably be accepted by most WCFs, or their member churches, as an expression of their self-understanding.

20. Within the sphere of Orthodoxy, too, there are statements which at least point in this direction. In the introductory reports of the Interorthodox Commission in preparation for the next Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church (1972), we

read: "It therefore follows that our Holy Orthodox Church, conscious of the significance and importance of present-day Christianity, not only recognizes - though being herself the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church - the ontological existence of all these Christian Churches and Confessions, but also positively believes that all her relationships with them are founded on the quickest and most objective clarification possible of the ecclesiological question and of their doctrinal teaching as a whole."[12]

21. At a meeting of Orthodox church leaders in Crete (1975), it was affirmed that "the Orthodox Church does not expect that other Christians be converted to Orthodoxy in its historical and cultural reality of the past and the present and to become members of the Orthodox Church. Its desire is that all should strive in their own churches and traditions to deepen the fulness of the apostolic faith embodied in a fully ecclesial life. No church is therefore required to uproot itself, to cut itself off from its cultural heritage or to lose its distinctive character. Each would contribute to the enrichment of all."[13]

22. It is certainly not yet true that all churches represented at WCF Conferences have reached the point where they can mutually recognize each other, in the full sense of the term, as specific manifestations of the one catholic and apostolic church. But none of them claims - as it may have done at some time in the past - to be the church of Christ in an exclusive sense. This attitude implies at least a tacit acknowledgement that the one church of Christ can and does exist in various and diverse worldwide forms. Without doubt, this provides the basis for the present intensive dialogs between the various WCFs.

IMPLICATIONS

Method and Goal of the WCFs Ecumenical Endeavors

23. The conviction that, on the world level, there are, and can legitimately be, diverse manifestations of the one catholic church and the one apostolic faith - a conviction shared, I believe, explicitly or implicitly, by all WCFs - does not only provide a basis for the current dialog between the various WCFs and churches: It also provides the dialog with a clear orientation with regard to both the method employed and the goal envisaged.

Methods:[14]

24. One of the main reasons why most of the WCFs clearly prefer the bilateral form of conversation is that dialogs of this kind assure a setting in which it is possible to concentrate more fully on the peculiarities of each partner and to illuminate them more clearly than is usually possible in multilateral talks.

25. The fact that these peculiarities consist primarily "in specific convictions of doctrinal or ecclesiological character"[15] explains another methodological characteristic of bilateral conversations: their tendency to focus primarily on questions of faith and order.

Envisaged goals:

26. The goal of the dialogs between the WCFs is determined above all by the theological aspect referred to above. If the one catholic and apostolic church subsists, and can subsist, in a diversity of visible forms, then this points toward a kind of unity in which these diversities and peculiarities can essentially be preserved.

27. The discussions and statements contained in the WCF discussion paper of November 1974 seem to follow this line of thought. The dialog between the confessions should not necessarily aim at bringing about the disappearance of inherited diversity; it should rather lead to a point at which, through a process of renewal and change, the existing diversities lose their divisive character, become recognizable as legitimate diversities within the one apostolic faith, and thus form a "unity in reconciled diversity"[16].

Attitude toward United Churches and Church Union Negotiations

28. The clear tendency among the WCFs to give preference to a concept of unity in which the different traditions can "have a continuing identifiable life" - even though renewed and transformed[17] - does not by any means indicate a rejection of church union, i.e., the rejection of a concept of unity according to which the different traditions and ecclesial identities must make way for a new tradition and a new identity held in common. This has been thoroughly discussed, and

expressed with increasing clarity, at several WCF Conferences[18].

29. At the enlarged October 12-14, 1965, Conference ("Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity"), the question addressed to the WCFs, whether they were "ready to give full encouragement and help to their members when they seek union with other churches", was answered in the affirmative by the WCFs represented (Reformed, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists).

30. The situation today is roughly as follows:

a) Within the framework of the constitutional regulations governing membership, most of the WCFs make provision for receiving united churches into, or keeping them within, their fellowship.

b) These regulations deal positively with the question of continued financial support to the united church by the respective WCFs.

c) The bilateral conversations between the WCFs in no way prevent the possibility of local or regional church union, but, to a certain degree, serve the explicit purpose of paving the way, and providing orientation for, such attempts at church union.

d) Consequently, the possibility exists for united churches to make their own ecumenical contribution to the life of the WCFs[19].

The Differences between the WCFs and the Question of a Common Name

Differences:

31. There are obvious differences between the WCFs as regards their self-understanding and their structures. (Here I am not referring to existing doctrinal and spiritual divergences.) These differences have often been emphasized, and not infrequently overemphasized. It will be necessary to make use of not one, but several, aids to understand these differences and determine their nature. For example:

a) Differences with regard to church order and structure: episcopal structure

(in the sense of the Ancient Church); synodical-episcopal structure; synodical structure; congregational structure.

b) Differences with regard to the ecclesial character or status of the individual WCFs: some regard themselves as churches in the fullest sense; others possess a definite ecclesial density without explicitly understanding themselves as churches; others again would not like to be more than loosely related and free associations (cf. paras. 59 and 60, below).

c) Differences with regard to the degree and nature of ecumenical involvement: some WCFs or churches are engaged in bilateral conversations, others are not (as yet); some WCFs have member churches that are all, or mostly, members of the WCC, some have a few that are members of the WCC, some have none.

d) Differences in respect of the existence of normative statements of doctrine (creeds, dogmas, confessions) and the nature of their acceptance.

32. As this paper tries to show, these - in part important - differences by no means rule out the fact that there are fundamental and obvious commonalities among the churches and WCFs represented at WCF Conferences which enable them to engage in fruitful cooperation.

Common name:

33. This leads to the question of an adequate name that all can share[20]. This should not, as often happens, be considered a harmless or neutral problem of terminology. It has been rightly pointed out that the names used up to now, rather than encourage joint undertakings, have hindered cooperation and mutual understanding; rather than promote recognition of existing commonalities, they have served to emphasize the differences.

34. According to Lewis Mudge, "this choice of terminology has obviously backfired"[21]. Lukas Vischer rightly observes that "the term 'confessional family' is obviously an obstacle on the road" to the necessary conversations between the large confessional groups[22]. The main problem is the use of the term "confessional". In spite of numerous attempts to interpret and understand

it in a broader sense (i.e., so that it embraces doctrinal statements as well as liturgy, piety, church structure, history, etc.), it does not seem to have become more acceptable.

35. The negative effect of the present choice of terminology is disturbing. For this reason, we may well finally adopt the name "Christian World Communions", a title which would probably find much wider acceptance and would also provide a link to early ecumenical terminology[23].

THE HISTORICAL CONTINUITY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE

36. The one catholic church, the "communion of saints", is not merely a present reality. It extends through all ages. Therefore, even though we perhaps confess our apostolic faith today in new ways, we still confess it in fellowship with our fathers, together with Christians of past generations, and out of our responsibility toward those witnesses who passed the gospel of Christ on to us.

37. *The strong emphasis on this dimension of our faith as having historical continuity and being rooted in history is another theological aspect determining the life and work of the WCFs.*

38. As illustrated by the above-mentioned definitions, the deliberations at WCF Conferences are clear examples of this. The working definition of 1962 speaks of the "general [Christian] tradition" and the "specific traditions" which the WCFs bring with them and to which they are committed. In the later definition of 1967, the concept of "tradition" - together with the concept of "heritage" - even becomes the key concept in determining the nature of the WCFs: "The term 'World Confessional Families' is used for the various Christian traditions taken as a whole. Each World Confessional Family consists of churches belonging to the same tradition and held together by this common heritage."[24]

39. Above all, the constitutions of the various WCFs - whether in stating their requirements for membership or in defining their purposes - nearly always give clear expression to the fact that their present life and work is seen to be carried out with a sense of responsibility to history and the historical heritage.

This heritage represents an essential basis for their fellowship, and the WCFs are determined to preserve it as something of value and make it fruitful for the present time.

40. Also outside the WCFs it is recognized that the preservation of historical continuity is a matter of concern for the World Confessional Families. For example, the report of Section II of the WCC Nairobi Assembly mentions that there is, in the confessional organizations, a "primary stress ... upon the necessity for faithfulness to the truth as it has been confessed in the past and as it is embodied in the received traditions"[25].

41. The report of the Nairobi Policy Reference Committee II, and later Document 9 of the WCC Executive Committee (February 1977), also take up this theme. We read, for example, that "each World Confessional Family gives expression to the common heritage of a group of churches throughout the world"[26]; and that "in dealing with the challenges of the contemporary world the WCFs primarily draw from the resources of the confessional heritage"[27].

IMPLICATIONS

42. The stress that has been placed on the historical continuity of the church and the Christian faith has also had a decisive influence on the life and work of the WCFs.

Unity in Time

43. One characteristic of the WCFs' ecumenical involvement, and especially of the bilateral dialogs, is that close attention is paid to the historical background of these families[28]. In a presentation to the WCF Conference in 1962, Norman Goodall said: "The world confessional organizations are at one with their own member churches in believing that a genuine ecumenical relationship does not imply a repudiation of history."[29] Since this history is a history of separation, it makes the ecumenical endeavor more difficult. How can one be faithful to one's historical heritage and yet at the same time overcome inherited divisions?

44. The bilateral conversations of the WCFs make it clear that this difficulty must not be bypassed in such a way that one turns away from the past, denies its contemporary significance, and becomes involved in seeking merely that unity which is possible and necessary here and now. The dialog participants know that this would be a pseudo-solution, merely a veneer on the surface of problems that would soon reappear.

45. Above all, however, this would be a rupture of the unity in time, which is no less an aspect of the full unity of the church than the unity of the church living here and now. This is where we find high regard for the past, which is apparent in bilateral conversations and often criticized. It is doubtless true that a high regard for the past can degenerate into a forgetting of the present. But a proper relationship with the present is possible only when there is an awareness and understanding of its historical roots.

46. The bilateral conversations have frequently shown that regard for historical continuity can include a thoroughly critical appraisal of the past, and that it need not tie the churches to past inherited divisions. The awareness that inherited convictions, doctrines, structures, and conflicts are historically conditioned; the insight that one and the same concern can become discernible in diverse and changeable forms of expression; and the methods of historical-critical research and hermeneutics make it possible to include the past in such a way that, on the one hand, inherited divisions are overcome, and, on the other hand, historical continuity is not ruptured[30].

Missionary Obedience and Historical Continuity

47. The preservation of historical continuity becomes a particular problem where it is necessary to bear witness to the Christian faith in new cultural contexts and in response to new challenges[31]. Today, the WCFs are, for the most part, very definitely aware of the fact that the inherited forms of church orders, liturgies, or confessions are conditioned by the specific historical and cultural situations out of which they have emerged.

48. Therefore, the preservation of these traditions in spite of changing times

and the transition from one cultural sphere to another is not a matter of course and not without its problems. Rather, it requires the difficult task of "translating such heritage - in the fullest sense of the word - i.e., seeking new forms of expression for it, and, to a certain extent, transforming that which has been inherited so that it does not deteriorate into a rigid law which would stifle any living missionary responsibility.

49. The WCFs therefore fully understand the questions which are being raised, especially those directed at them by the churches of Asia and Africa, and they share the concerns expressed therein. As affirmed in the statement of the WCF Consultation on "Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity" (October 12-14, 1965)[32], they know that the "historic confessions of the faith" (and similarly the inherited "structures of the Church"), which originally developed in "specific situations" and "in the face of specific challenge and attack", "may ... hinder the Church in its endeavour to confess Christ in the face of the contemporary challenge" and "often tend to become obstacles to a relevant witness and service to the world". It is also affirmed "that the present situation offers unprecedented challenges to the churches which call for a new and urgent response, both in the confessing of the faith and in the structures of church life"[33]. It is possible to observe how, to an ever increasing degree, the loyalty of many WCFs to their particular tradition is becoming less formalistic and legalistic in character.

50. Nevertheless, the WCFs would, by and large, reject the view that, because they have their origins at a certain point in the past and in a particular cultural context, their theological and liturgical traditions and inherited church structures are, so to say, *a priori* without significance, irrelevant, and a hindrance to contemporary missionary responsibility. They oppose an "actualistic" concept of missionary obedience which would tend to exempt itself from any responsibility to history. On the contrary, in the process of fulfilling their missionary task they draw upon their tradition as an essential - but not the only! - point by which to orient themselves. They would refuse to see missionary obedience and historical continuity as alternatives, and would not permit themselves to be looked upon as holding one-sidedly to the second of the two alternatives. Rather, they would emphatically want to keep missionary obedience and historical continuity together, even if it were necessary to engage in a constant struggle to achieve

their proper interrelation.

51. The Section II report of the Nairobi Assembly is in danger of describing the relationship in an excessively one-sided way[34]. Already in his presentation to the above-mentioned WCC Consultation (October 2-5, 1963), Arne Sovik rightly said: "It will, I think, be generally recognized that the historic confessions of the western churches, useful as they are, are not the only factors in defining the testimony ... of a younger church. That testimony is formed from a combination of factors: the common tradition that binds all Christians together, the more closely defined and elaborated tradition ... of a particular family of churches, and finally, that common understanding of the Gospel that springs from a given cultural background."[35]

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AS A UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP TRANSCENDING NATIONAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

52. The church is the people of God, gathered together out of the midst of all peoples. It is a fellowship which does not merely cross the boundaries separating the ages, but also crosses and transcends the boundaries between races, cultures, countries, and nations.

53. *This worldwide dimension of Christian fellowship, its universal, catholic range, finds special expression in the WCFs.* Even if - as a consequence of the multiplicity of confessions - every WCF represents merely a partial realization of this universality of Christian fellowship, it is still true that the faith held in common demonstrates its power to transcend boundaries.

54. This was one of the main reasons for the formation of the individual World Confessional Families. Being aware of their fellowship in the same faith, the churches recognized that it transcended national, ethnic, and cultural barriers, and were determined to live this fellowship: by mutual assistance, by joint witness and service, and by overcoming those dangers which result from national, cultural, or ethnic isolation. Their common tradition and, resulting from this, their conscious belonging together as churches and their mutual commitment proved to be strong enough to achieve this.

55. It has, therefore, been repeatedly underscored that one of the most important characteristics of the WCFs is the fact that they are an embodiment of the universal dimension of Christian fellowship[36]. The 1967 definition states that the WCFs "are conscious of living in the same universal fellowship and give to this consciousness at least some structured visible expression"[37].

56. The constitutions of the various WCFs also reflect this awareness: Their aims always include the proviso that the worldwide fellowship among their member churches is to be fostered, promoted, and deepened. This concern for universal fellowship seems to be especially well formulated in the constitution of the World Methodist Council: The first of its purposes is "to deepen the fellowship of Methodist peoples over the barriers of race, nationality, colour, and language"[38].

57. Even when the WCFs are criticized - as for example in the so-called "Bangalore Declaration" of the November 1961 East Asian Christian Conference - it is also recognized that the WCFs "help to lift Christians out of local isolation and aid them in surmounting national barriers.... Their strong international ties often protect small groups of Christians from dangerous introversion and narrow nationalism."[39]

58. When, in the years between New Delhi (1961) and Uppsala (1968) - after a great deal of emphasis on the unity "in each place" - efforts were resumed to emphasize the unity "in all places" and thus reaffirm the "catholicity" and unity of the church, this aspect was instrumental in furthering a new, positive appreciation of the WCFs and their ecumenical role. The WCC Uppsala Assembly was able to see in the WCFs "some real experience of universality" - even though this experience remains "inevitably partial" as a result of the continuing divisions between the confessions[40].

IMPLICATIONS

The Ecclesial Character of the WCFs

59. As has already been pointed out (see para. 31. b, above), there are considerable differences between the WCFs as far as their ecclesial character or status is concerned. The majority would not like to be understood as "churches" in the

full sense, let alone as "world churches", but rather as worldwide fellowships of autonomous member churches whose autonomy and character as churches are not curtailed through their membership in a WCF. The real ecclesial emphasis within the individual WCFs thus rests primarily with their member churches. Most of the constitutions of the WCFs are very clear on this point.

60. At the same time, however, it is evident, and actually implicit in the nature of things, that the WCFs, in contrast to many other ecclesiastical and ecumenical associations (as, for example, the WCC), demonstrate varying degrees of "ecclesial density" and possess an ecclesial consciousness - a consciousness which has grown as a result of the fellowship they have experienced, lived, and repeatedly found to be of value[41]. This ecclesial character becomes apparent in various ways.

a) The individual WCFs, in their worldwide fellowship, are kept so close together by *the faith which they hold in common* that *joint witness, mission, and service* are an immediate and natural consequence of that common faith; problems emerging in these areas are, as a rule, only of an ad hoc, and not of a fundamental, nature.

b) With few exceptions, there is *full sacramental fellowship* in all WCFs. Where this is lacking, it is felt to be an anomaly, and an attempt is made "to establish it as soon as possible"[42].

c) *Membership* in one of the member churches of a WCF confers the right of membership *ipso facto* in all others.

d) Within the individual WCFs there is a *common ministry*. This means that - within the framework of regulations - an exchange of ministers is basically possible.

e) Each WCF has developed clearly defined *forms of government* (synod, general assemblies, executive committee, president, etc.) which are responsible for upholding the fellowship - even though, in most instances, such leadership groups or leaders have no authority over the autonomous member churches.

f) Consequently, the WCFs are in a position, and in part - on constitutional

grounds - entitled, *to assume tasks which have been delegated to them by their member churches and are often ecclesial in nature* (interconfessional dialogs, missionary activity, Christian education, et al.).

61. This does not alter the fact that the results of, for example, the interconfessional dialogs carried out by the WCFs on behalf of their churches, become binding for the churches only when they have been officially received and accepted by the churches themselves.

The Role of the WCFs in Questioning Confessional Narrowness and Rigidity

62. Worldwide fellowship, even among churches which are closely related to each other, can never be homogenous or monolithic. The element of a given diversity and continuing diversification is, as it were, built into such worldwide fellowships, since close proximity to sister churches of different cultural or racial background and historical origin inevitably opens one's eyes to the flexibility and variability of a confessional heritage.

63. This has been observed and proved on several occasions. Norman Goodall, for example, has said: "It could also be contended that most of these family-colloquies have provided their own impetus to self-criticism and to something more than conservation, not least through the discovery at close quarters of the many differences represented within the one group."[43]

64. The minutes of the October 1963 Consultation include the following interesting remark: "Dr. Visser 't Hooft drew a distinction between the world confessional organizations and their member churches. He recalled certain instances where churches had acted intransigently even though the confessional body of which they were members had advocated a different attitude."[44]

65. The WCFs are, therefore, by no means "refuges" and "fortresses" of an intransigent confessionalism, as they have often been designated. Precisely their universal character has contributed to the fact that they have, to a large extent, been able to overcome a narrow and rigid confessionalism. This

can even lead to individual WCFs becoming the object of a full-blown "confessionalistic opposition" from churches of the same tradition which do not want to be associated with "their" WCF because they are convinced that it has watered down the confessional heritage[45].

66. In any case, it can be shown that while the WCFs have been in existence there has often been a modification of the confessional stance. This becomes apparent in various ways.

a) It can result in changes within the constitution of a WCF, e.g., by defining the confessional norms of the fellowship in a more open and less formalistic manner than before[46].

b) Churches are received into the fellowship of a WCF even though they do not fully satisfy the prevailing confessional requirements for membership. Thus, churches which had not adopted the Confessio Augustana as their confession of faith were, nevertheless, accepted into the Lutheran World Federation.

c) It is also possible to maintain fellowship with those churches which, in their spiritual and theological development, have to a certain degree moved further and further away from the common basis which nevertheless has been, and will continue to be, of formal validity. The *Book of Common Prayer*, which, according to the definition given by the 1930 Lambeth Conference, is accepted by all the churches of the Anglican Communion in its standard form (and the acceptance of which is one of the particular characteristics of this Communion) exists today in a multiplicity of editions in the individual national churches or provinces.

d) Developments such as, for example, the merger of two WCFs, the possibility of "double membership" (i.e., that a church can be affiliated to two WCFs), and the possibility of membership for united churches (see paras. 19 and 20) also fall into this category - even though these developments result less directly from the worldwide character of the Confessional Families.

The WCFs and the Ecumenical Movement

67. The simultaneous emergence of "intraconfessional" efforts for unity (which led to the establishment of the WCFs), on the one hand, and "inter- and trans-

confessional"[47] efforts for unity (which led to the establishment of the WCC), on the other, has often been referred to - and interpreted in various ways. Though not historically exact in every detail[48], in a broader historical context it may be appropriate to speak of the "historical simultaneity" of these two movements.

68. Another form of simultaneity goes hand in hand with this "historical" simultaneity: a "simultaneity of personnel" participating in both movements, i.e., the same churches, and often the same church leaders and personalities, were committed to both movements "simultaneously", supported these movements, and helped guide their development.

69. It is precisely this "double simultaneity" which rules out the view that the "intraconfessional" efforts for unity came about as a reaction to the "inter- and transconfessional" efforts, or vice versa. It is generally understood that both endeavors have sprung from one and the same ecumenical movement, that the one ecumenical movement embraced two different forms from the outset[49].

70. The way they belonged together and complemented each other in the situation of that time was described by Visser 't Hooft in his well-known greeting at the first LWF Assembly (1947): "The World Council is deeply aware of the fact that the ecumenical task can only be performed if the main confessional federations and alliances perform their task of bringing the churches of their confessional family together in close fellowship and so prepare the way for the even greater and more difficult task of establishing the wider ecumenical Christian brotherhood."[50]

71. The years after Amsterdam (1948) can thus be regarded as a period of positive and satisfactory cooperation between the WCFs and the WCC. On the one hand, this is underscored in "The Report of the Central Committee to the [WCC 1954 Evanston] Assembly concerning the Structures and Functioning of the Council in the Period following the Second Assembly": "It may be noted with satisfaction that almost all world confessional associations have gone on record as wishing to support the ecumenical movement, and it is suggested that the General Secretary shall arrange for informal consultations from time to time, with three or four representatives from each association, to discuss the implementation of that desire and other common problems."[51] On the other hand, almost all WCF constitutions express a positive

attitude toward the development of, and a determination to participate in, the ecumenical movement.

72. But it seems that the 60s were marked by considerable tension and a tendency toward polarization, the reasons and motives for which cannot be examined in this paper. Many statements were issued, some very critical (e.g., those of the East Asia Christian Conference and the WCC Youth Department). These statements emphasize the contrast between confessional loyalty and ecumenical responsibility, question the right to exist and the working method of the WCFs, point to an unnecessary duplication of WCC and WCF activities, and even speak of competition.

73. This seems to be reflected in the New Delhi Section on Unity report when it talks about church leaders "who see the world confessional bodies as a threat to wider unity, a view which some Asian and African Christians have often expressed with vigor."[52]

74. The WCF Conference faced these criticisms at special consultations as well as at their regular meetings[53]. A more positive trend became apparent in the late 60s - at and around the WCC Uppsala Assembly (1968). Within the framework of this paper, it is impossible to explore in detail the reasons and motives for this change of attitude. It is, nevertheless, true to say that a new and more positive opinion of the ecumenical role of the WCFs began to emerge at Uppsala (see para. 58) and continued through the WCC Nairobi Assembly (1975).

75. This positive trend, and the existing determination to improve relations between the WCC and the WCFs, should, of course, be seen against a changed ecumenical background. And all efforts to concretize and implement this new relationship between the WCC and the WCFs had to take full account of this changed ecumenical situation in order to achieve their goal. The WCFs are no longer mere agents of the "intraconfessional" ecumenical movement; to an increasing degree, over the last 15 years or so, they have become significant supporters and agents also of the "inter- and transconfessional" - i.e., more inclusive - ecumenical movement, and thus full partners of the WCC[54].

76. But the fact remains that efforts for unity continue to encompass a variety

of forms. These efforts are not in opposition to one another, but are based on different emphases and different methodological approaches, none of which are negligible.

77. These differences (which were referred to, for example, at Nairobi) can best be seen and understood in their complementarity if the three main theological aspects or concerns which determine the life and work of the WCFs - and which this paper has attempted to present - are taken as the point of departure. Put in a highly simplified form, and therefore in a manner open to a great deal of misunderstanding, the way in which both forms of ecumenical endeavor differ from, and complement, each other can be described as follows:

78. The WCFs and the WCC base their ecumenical endeavors on the assumption that the desired unity of the church will and ought to leave room for a unity which embraces diversity. However, whereas the WCFs emphasize that such diversities can also include the inherited diversities of ecclesial and confessional traditions, the WCC emphasizes the need to transform - or often even abandon - these inherited diversities. Above all, the WCC cautions against a unity which does not change the partners, a unity which consists of coexistence within the *status quo*.

79. The WCFs and the WCC want to achieve a unity of the churches in witness and service here and now, while at the same time preserving the "unity in time" and the dimension of historical continuity. But, whereas the WCFs emphasize the help to be drawn from history and the historical heritage for the joint witness and work of the churches here and now, the WCC emphasizes the difficulties and wrestles with the problems encountered in witness and service today as a result of a strong link with the past.

80. The WCFs and the WCC are endeavoring to bring about the unity of Christians "in each place" as well as "throughout the world". But here, too, there are differences in approach and emphasis. Whereas, within the WCC, the emphasis appears to be placed more strongly on achieving unity "in each place" (this being the starting point for a universal Christian fellowship), most of the WCFs tend to place more importance on the universal dimension of Christian unity and to

deal with local unity within this broader perspective. Also with regard to the concept of "universal fellowship" there are differing points of view: While within the framework of the WCC the universal Christian fellowship is seen primarily as a fellowship of word and deed realized in and directed toward the world, the WCFs are more concerned with the need to develop a common bond among all Christians and churches, and thus with the need for the ecclesial dimension of universal Christian fellowship.

NOTES

1. See the following paper by Edmond Perret (referred to below as: Perret), paras. 6 ff.

2. *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, January 1966, p. 91; *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, p. 35; Minutes, World Confessional Groups, Geneva, April 3-4, 1962, p. 5. Cf. also Perret, para. 58.

3. "The Place of World Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement", *Study Encounter*, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1968, p. 46.

4. These differences have been emphasized, for example, in the above-mentioned statement on "The Place of World Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" (1967), paras. 2 and 3; in Harold E. Fey's article "Confessional Families and the Ecumenical Movement", *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume 2, 1948-1968* (London: SPCK, 1970), pp. 133 ff; in the 1974 discussion paper "The Ecumenical Role of World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement", *WCC Exchange*, No. 3/2, July 1977, pp. 4 ff; in the report of Policy Reference Committee II at Nairobi, "Relationships between the WCC and World Confessional Families, *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November - 10 December, 1975*, ed. David M. Paton (London: SPCK / Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), p. 198, para. 13; and in Document 9 of the WCC Executive Committee (February 14-18, 1977), "Toward a New Relationship with World Confessional Families", *LWF Report*, No. 3, 1978, p. 47 and *WCC Exchange*, No. 3/1, July 1977, p. 2. Nils Ehrenström goes so far as to speak about an "extreme heterogeneity" ("The World Confessional Families in the Service of Unity", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, 1974, p. 266).

5. See note 2, above.

6. Lewis S. Mudge, "The World Confessional Families and Ecumenical Relationships", *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, p. 51.

7. Lukas Vischer in his paper "The Place and Task of Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" (presented at the meeting of World Confessional Bodies, October 12-13, 1966), *The Duke Divinity School Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Winter 1968, p. 37.

8. Stephen F. Bayne, "'World Confessionalism' and the Ecumenical Movement", *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, p. 61.

9. Mudge, op. cit., p. 48.

10. *Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran World Federation: Report of the Working Group on the Interrelations between the Various Bilateral Dialogues* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1977), p. 31, para. 135.

11. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 8. Cf. also Decree on Ecumenism, No. 4.

12. *Towards the Great Council: Introductory reports of the Inter-orthodox Commission in preparation for the next Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church* (London: SPCK, 1972), p. 50.

13. *Orthodox Contributions to Nairobi: Papers Compiled and Presented by the Orthodox Task Force of the WCC* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975), p. 32.

14. See Nils Ehrenström/Günther Gassmann, *Confessions in Dialogue: A Survey of Bilateral Conversations Among World Confessional Families 1959-1974* (Third, revised and enlarged edition by Nils Ehrenström [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975]), chapters III (pp. 124 ff.) and IV (pp. 127 ff.).

15. See note 2, above.

16. "The Ecumenical Role of World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement" (see note 4, above), paras. 17 ff., pp. 6 ff., and paras. 27 ff., p. 8 ff. See also "Report from the First Forum on Bilateral Conversations" (April 2-7, 1978), *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978, p. 61, and, more recently, "Reflections on the Common Goal" (Report of Committee I), *Sharing in One Hope: Commission on Faith and Order, Bangalore 1978*, Faith and Order Paper No. 92 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979), pp. 235-242.

17. "Report from the First Forum on Bilateral Conversations", op. cit., p. 61.

18. See Perret, paras. 73 ff., and also "The Ecumenical Role of World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement" (see note 4, above), para. 4, p. 1.

19. The Constitutions of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Article II), the World Methodist Council (Article III), and the Anglican Consultative Council (Schedule Membership), for example, make provision for the membership of united churches. Policy decisions have been made in recent times, for example at the 1968 Lambeth Conference (see *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* [London: SPCK / New York: Seabury Press, 1968], Resolutions 48-50, pp. 42-43) and at the 1970 LWF Assembly (see "Statement concerning the Attitude of the LWF to Church Union Negotiations", *Sent into the World: The Proceedings of the Fifth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Evian, France, July 14-24, 1970*, ed. LaVern K. Grosc [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971], pp. 142-143). See also my article, "Relations between United Churches and World Confessional Families, *Midstream*, Vol. IX, No. 2/3, 1970/71, pp. 101-120.

20. See Perret, paras. 55 ff.

21. Mudge (see note 6, above), p. 46.

22. "The Place and Task of the Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" (see note 7, above), p. 37.

23. See, for example, Yves Marie Joseph Congar, "Note sur les mots 'confession', 'église' et 'communion', *Chrétiens en dialogue: Contributions catholiques à l'oecuménisme* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1964), pp. 211 ff., especially pp. 241 and 242 where he refers to the older ecumenical terminology. Cf. also *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978, Appendix 7, p. 74.

24. See note 3, above.

25. "What Unity Requires", *Breaking Barriers* (see note 4, above), p. 65, para. 14.

26. Report of Policy Reference Committee II, "Relationships between the WCC and World Confessional Families", *Breaking Barriers*, para. 1, p. 195.

27. "Toward a New Relationship with World Confessional Families", (see note 4, above), pp. 48 and 3, resp.

28. Ehrenström/Gassmann (see note 14, above), p. 131.

29. Norman Goodall, "World Confessionalism and the Ecumenical Movement", *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, pp. 54-55.

30. Ehrenström/Gassmann, p. 131.

31. Questions concerning missionary obedience and responsibility were treated at the WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism (theme: "Freedom and Responsibility for Confession and Unity in the Indigenous Church", October 2-5, 1963) and at an enlarged

meeting of World Confessional Bodies on the theme "Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity" (October 12-13, 1965).

32. All lectures delivered at this consultation are to be found in the *International Review of Missions*, Vol. LV, No. 218, April 1966 (see "Additional Sources", pp. 41-42 of this issue).

33. "Statement of a Joint Consultation Concerning Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, January 1966, pp. 92 f., and *Lutheran World*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1966, pp. 193 f.

34. See note 25, above.

35. Proceedings, WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, October 2-5, 1963, pp. 14-15.

36. Cf., for example, the papers by Lewis Mudge and Stephen Bayne (see notes 6 and 8, above), pp. 50 and 64-67, resp. In "The Place and Task of Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" (see note 7, above), Lukas Vischer wrote: "The confessional alliances have a particular responsibility for realizing the universality of the Church." (p. 34). See also "The Ecumenical Role of the World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement" (see note 4, above), para. 2, p. 3.

37. See note 3, above.

38. "Constitution of the World Methodist Council", *World Methodist Council: Handbook of Information 1971-1976* (n.p., n.d.), Article II.a), p. 11.

39. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Enlarged Continuation Committee of the East Asia Christian Conference held at Bangalore, India, 7-12 November, 1961* (Jaffna, Sri Lanka: St. Joseph's Catholic Press, n.d.), p. 38.

40. Section I report "The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church", *The Uppsala 68 Report: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, July 4-20, 1968*, ed. Norman Goodall (Geneva: World Council of Churches: 1968), para. 19, p. 17. See also "Report of the Assembly Committee on Faith and Order", ibid., pp. 225-226.

41. "The Ecumenical Role of World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement" (see note 4, above) refers to the WCFs as "ecclesial bodies" (para. 6, p. 4).

42. See note 3, above.

43. Norman Goodall (see note 29, above), p. 55.

44. Proceedings, WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, p. 6.

45. On this particular subject, see my article "Konfessionelle Weltbünde zwischen Konfessionalismus und Entkonfessionalisierung", *Una Sancta*, Vol. 26, No. 1/2, 1971, pp. 51-59.

46. Compare, for example, Article II of the 1954 Constitution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (*Proceedings of the Seventeenth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian Order Held at Princeton, N.J., USA, 1954*, ed. Marcel Pradervand [Geneva: Office of the Alliance, 1954], p. 55) with that of the 1970 Constitution (*Proceedings of the Uniting General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches [Presbyterian and Congregational] Held at Nairobi, Kenya, August 20-30, 1970* [Geneva: Office of the Alliance, 1970], p. 40). Also, the gradual weakening significance and authority of the "Thirty-Nine Articles" in the life of the Anglican Communion as confirmed at the 1968 Lambeth Conference (cf. *The Lambeth Conference 1968* [see note 19, above], Resolution 43, pp. 40-41) can be taken as an obvious example.

47. This, or similar, terminology has often been used in the past (cf., for example, Harold E. Fey [see note 4, above], p. 122).

48. Several WCFs were already formed during the last century - for example, the Anglican Communion (first Lambeth Conference, 1867), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1877), and the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists (1863) -, and most of the other WCFs were in the process of formation.

49. H.E. Fey, for example, shares the opinion of H. Carter (Methodist) when he says: "The ecumenical movement has taken two forms, inter- and intra-confessional, and Methodism as a world-wide confession is explicitly related to both." (see note 4, above, p. 122). Similarly, speaking of the WCC and the WCFs, Lukas Vischer affirms that both "are constitutive elements of a single whole" ("The Place and Task of Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" [see note 7, above], p. 34). Stephen Bayne's comment that the Anglican Communion is "an ecumenical fact in itself, an existing, visible, unity within a divided church" ("'World Confessionalism' and the Ecumenical Movement" [see note 8, above], p. 64) can certainly be shared *mutatis mutandis* by each WCF. The Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Convention made a similar statement at its 1963 meeting (see *Lutheran World Almanac 1934-1937* [New York: The National Lutheran Council, 1937], p. 36).

50. *Proceedings of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden, June 30-July 6, 1947* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1948), p. 186. Twenty years later, the second WCC General Secretary, Eugene Carson Blake, made a somewhat similar statement in his address to the November 20-22, 1968 WCF Conference. He recognized that the WCFs "have made and are making important contributions to the life of small

minority churches in bringing them out of pure localism or provincialism into the first stage at least of ecumenism" (p. 2) Taking into account the new ecumenical role assumed in the meantime by the WCFs, this statement was, however, no longer appropriate.

51. *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954*, ed., W.A. Visser 't Hooft (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 184-185.

52. *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961*, ed. W.A. Visser 't Hooft (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 132. Cf. Harold E. Fey (see note 4, above), p. 124.

53. Cf. Harold E. Fey, pp. 124-130.

54. "The Ecumenical Role of World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement" (see note 4, above), paras. 1-5, pp. 1-2, especially para. 1.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

(In Chronological Order)

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Rouse, Ruth. "Other Aspects of the Ecumenical Movement 1910 - 1948 - World Denominational Fellowships. ibid., pp. 613-620.

Mudge, Lewis S. "World Confessionalism and Ecumenical Strategy". *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4, July 1959, pp. 379-393.

Schmidt-Clausen, Kurt. "The World Confessional Families and the Ecumenical Movement". *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, pp. 35-44.

Taylor, John V. "Missionary Responsibility in the Anglican Communion". *International Review of Missions*, Vol. LV, No. 218, 1966, pp. 145-156.

Empie, Paul C. "Dilemmas of World Confessional Groups with respect to Engagement in Mission and Unity". ibid., pp. 157-170.

Jones, Tracey K. "Mission, Unity, World Methodism and a Board of Missions". ibid., pp. 171-181.

Niesel, Wilhelm. "Engagement in Mission and Unity of the Church". ibid., pp. 182-188.

Appel, Andrê. "Konfessionelle Weltbünde und Ökumene Heute". *Ökumenische Rundschau*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1969, pp. 442-450.

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EDMOND PERRET

THE CONFERENCE OF SECRETARIES OF WORLD CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES: 1957 - 1977

Introduction

1. In 1977, the Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families (WCFs) celebrated its twentieth anniversary! From the official documents, it is not clear whether it came into being in August or November 1957. Two different kinds of meetings were held that year, and both of them could claim to be the origin of our Conference today. Fortunately, Dr. Marcel Pradervand, one of the participants at the 1957 WCC (World Council of Churches) Central Committee meeting in Yale and my predecessor as General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), has kept all his diaries and was able to tell me that the first meeting of the General Secretaries of WCFs was held on August 1, 1957 - from 12.30 to 15.00!

2. 1977 was therefore an appropriate year in which to look back, follow the path which had been taken, identify the itinerary, and evaluate positive and negative aspects in the light of present circumstances. The main intention of this paper is to provoke reaction and reexamine the basic question of the existence of our Conference, its present role, and the way it accomplishes its mission. From time to time, such an analysis can be beneficial.

3. But it is not an easy task. To be fully useful it would imply that the entire work of our Conference be viewed from three perspectives: first, the general perspective - historical and theological - which emanates from the Conference itself; second, the global, ecumenical perspective; and third, the perspective of each of the constituent WCFs.

DR. EDMOND PERRET is General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. His paper treats the history of the Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families up to 1977. For subsequent developments, see Appendix 4 (pp. 78-80) and *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978 (Appendix 7, pp. 73-87).

4. As this could not be accomplished within the framework of this study, I opted for a different approach and made a kind of historical survey of the Conference over the past 20 years. It is as if I had taken a look at the family album.

5. Since, as far as I am aware, no archives have been built up, and I therefore had to rely on documents collected in the files of the WARC and compare them with those of the WCC, this historical approach proved more difficult than I had anticipated!

THE ORIGIN OF THE ANNUAL WCF CONFERENCE

6. The idea of bringing together representatives of the large WCFs had been germinating for a long time. But the formal constitution of certain WCFs, and the formation of the WCC (1948), pointed to the necessity of deepening the - mainly personal - contacts which had existed for many years[1]. The fact that many ecumenical gatherings invited consultants from the confessional alliances to take part in their work reinforced many precious personal links.

7. The first ecumenical document to mention the necessity of developing a certain coordination between the WCC and the WCFs is "The Report of the Central Committee to the 1954 Evanston Assembly concerning the Structure and Functioning of the Council in the Period following the Second Assembly": "It may be noted with satisfaction that almost all world confessional associations have gone on record as wishing to support the ecumenical movement, and it is suggested that the General Secretary shall arrange for informal consultations from time to time, with three or four representatives from each association, to discuss the implementation of that desire and other common problems."[2]

8. Here, mention must be made of Dr. John A. Mackay, who played an important role in this field. Chairman of the International Missionary Council from 1945-1951, President of Princeton Theological Seminary from 1947-1958, and President of the World Presbyterian Alliance from 1954-1959, Dr. Mackay was convinced of the necessity of bringing together the leaders of the various confessional families for the benefit of the ecumenical movement. As early as 1951, soon after the formation of the WCC, one of his main concerns was what he called "the resurgence of

denominationalism" or "neo-denominationalism". Under his leadership, the WARC Executive Committee adopted what is now known as the "Basle Statement of the WARC", which defines the role of that body toward the ecumenical movement. It is worth quoting part of it: "If the great world denominations, the Reformed Churches among them, pursue world denominational preeminence and make their great world bodies ends in themselves, they will betray Jesus Christ. But, if they desire, and succeed in their desire, to make denominational emphasis an enrichment of the common evangelical heritage, they will, by so doing, fulfil the designs of the one Head of the Church and be true organs of the Holy Spirit."[3]

9. At the WARC General Council which preceded the Evanston Assembly by less than one month, the following resolution was adopted (once again under the lead given by Dr. Mackay, who had spoken on "The Witness of the Reformed Churches in the World Today"[4]): "Whereas the ecumenical concern is a primary obligation of all churches; and whereas the present development of world confessional organizations raises a number of serious problems which ought to be examined in common as befits brethren in Christ, so as not to hinder the sound development of Christianity: The 17th General Council therefore resolves to remit to the Executive Committee of the Alliance the consideration of the best ways and means of furthering such consultations, and the taking of any action."[5]

10. In a letter in the WARC archives dated March 27, 1957, Dr. Mackay mentions discussions he had with Dr. Visser 't Hooft "several years ago" regarding consultation between leaders of the WCFs. At that time, the question was to decide who, within the WCC or the WCFs, should take the initiative to call the first meeting. There was general agreement that it was not the responsibility of the WCC to take the first steps, but opinions varied about the timeliness of such a conference, and especially about the chances of success in calling one. Dr. Mackay notes that some felt that "the question was too explosive.... Such a gathering ... would be quite innocuous and it would be impossible to get at the real facts."

11. Dr. Mackay's idea was to call a meeting of those WCF representatives who would be present at WCC Central Committee meetings. This happened twice: at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, in the summer of 1957; and in Nyborg, Denmark, in 1958. I could not find any document about the first gathering, and it was unfortunate that

Dr. Mackay's health made it impossible for him to reply in detail to my letter enquiring about his motives in suggesting such a conference, and requesting any document on this subject in his files.

12. However, two WARC Executive Committee minutes do refer to this gathering.

13. In Prague in 1956, under the chairmanship of Dr. Mackay, the WARC Executive Committee unanimously adopted a motion which expressed the hope "that in the near future an informal gathering can be arranged between representatives of the several world confessional bodies in the Protestant family of churches. The object of this meeting would be to provide an opportunity for the representatives of each confession to interpret to their brethren of the other confessions the nature, objectives, and development of the group to which they belong."[6]

14. This motion calls for two comments: First, the idea of a Protestant family of churches must not be taken in a restrictive sense, but should be placed in its historical context. It was mainly in the 1960s that cooperation with the Orthodox churches became an integral part of WCC work. As far as relations with the Roman Catholic Church are concerned, the 1950s were, as Dr. Visser 't Hooft says his *Memoirs*, "a period of contradictory developments, some leading to increased tension, others to a *rapprochement* between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church"[7].

15. Second, this was the first time that a WCF document mentioned the goal assigned to such a conference, i.e., the sharing of information with a view to deeper mutual understanding. In his paper presented to the Prague WARC meeting, "The Confessional Resurgence and the Ecumenical Movement", Dr. Mackay envisages a larger task: "The Ecumenical Movement and the Confessional Movement are developing side by side.... What is to be the future relationship of these two movements? This is one of the most crucial questions confronting Protestant Christianity in our time.... The Confessional Movement could develop in such a way as to wreck the Ecumenical Movement or at least reduce the World Council of Churches to a venerated ecclesiastical facade.... On the other hand the Confessional Movement, if wisely directed, can and should enrich the Ecumenical Movement.... The several confessions must at the same time define their nature in

relation to the other Confessions and begin to think through their role in the world of our time."[8] Confessional leaders must "come together for the exchange of information and the discussion of policies in an atmosphere of Christian confidence."[9]

16. Since there is no report from the Yale meeting, it is interesting to quote in full a motion adopted by the WARC Executive Committee at its 1957 meeting in Stony Point, USA.

17. "The Executive Committee believes that the confrontation initiated should be followed up, and therefore encourages and authorizes the President of the Alliance to secure a further conference at which both the chairman or presidents and the executive secretaries of the confessional groups should be present. It is suggested that in the light of the recent meeting in New Haven the meeting might be held at the next meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Denmark in the summer of 1958, or at such time as might be agreed upon by the Chairman and General Secretary. Such a conference as is here proposed would engage in frank and friendly discussion of the place of confessionalism in the ecumenical movement; the contributions which resurgent confessionalism can make to the enrichment of that movement, and the points at which, if any, confessionalism becomes a threat to that growing oneness in Christ which the ecumenical movement seeks; and ways in which the commitment of the churches to the ecumenical movement presupposes some restraint on the consciousness and practice of mission on the part of the confessional groups with reference to each other. A preliminary consideration of these and related issues might well eventuate in the drawing up of an agenda to be undertaken by further conferences. It is believed that such a confrontation between confessional groups should, in the initial stages at least, be undertaken apart from, although not unaware of, the World Council's implicit concern with the issues involved."[10]

18. Adopted a few days after the Yale meeting, this motion has some interesting aspects: First, it is envisaged that the meeting be similar to the one held in Yale, and that participants include the officers of the various WCFs and not only their general secretaries.

19. Second, it is proposed that the meeting take place during the WCC Central Committee sessions, not only to avoid unreasonable expense, but also to emphasize the link between these confessional meetings and the ecumenical movement, and avoid any competition.

20. Finally, the above is confirmed in the second paragraph of the resolution. In addition to the goal assigned to the first gathering (sharing of information, better mutual understanding), it is now clearly stated that the work of the WCFs is located within the ecumenical movement. This is a direct echo of the ecumenical text adopted in Evanston.

21. But another meeting of WCF leaders (mainly general secretaries) was already being arranged for November 14-15, 1957, in Geneva. Why should there be a meeting in Geneva only three months after the Yale gathering?

22. Again, there are few documents in the archives. In a letter dated February 28, 1957, the then General Secretary of the WCC, Dr. Visser 't Hooft, writes to the General Secretaries of the Lutheran World Federation (Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Dr. Marcel Pradervand) proposing that a meeting (two representatives per confessional group) take place in November of that year: "I would suggest that you two, as the General Secretaries of the two confessional bodies in Geneva, call the meeting." Since Dr. Pradervand felt bound by the 1956 Prague resolution of his Executive Committee (and later by the resolution of the 1957 Stony Point meeting), he requested his colleague, Dr. Lund-Quist, to take the initiative and call a meeting of those confessional alliances with which the WCC had relations, according to a list provided by Dr. Visser 't Hooft[11].

23. In a letter to Dr. Mackay dated March 1, 1957, Dr. Pradervand forwards information he received from the WCC General Secretary: "Dr. Visser 't Hooft ... says that the meeting he has in mind for November 1957 is not meant to replace the gathering that the Executive [Committee] of the Alliance (WARC) had in mind, and that it will be of a more technical nature. That is the reason why only Secretaries of the World Confessional Organizations are invited."

24. These two types of gatherings - one of a general nature involving more repre-

sentatives of the WCFs, the other more technical involving only WCF staff members - continued to exist side by side from 1957 to 1959 and form the origin of the present Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families.

25. The minutes of the November 1957 meeting, which was held in Geneva, show that Dr. Lund-Quist was elected Chairman, and Dr. Pradervand Secretary, that participants came from those WCFs suggested by Dr. Visser 't Hooft, and that the agenda was composed of the following items: a) information matters (report on the structure and function of the different World Confessional Organizations, future policies and programs); b) matters for cooperation (future contacts between confessional groups); and c) matters of ecumenical interest (the contribution of the different Confessions to ecumenical life, relationships of World Confessions to the WCC and to schemes of national or other unions). These details are worth noting because they show that this meeting was not solely of a technical nature, but that the agenda covered some of the concerns expressed at the Yale meeting. Thus, very rapidly - as of 1959 - the merger of the two streams, or kinds of gatherings, which preceded the present Conference took place. How did this come about?

26. In 1958, a meeting took place in Nyborg during the WCC Central Committee meeting. It was similar to the one at Yale, but much smaller - in fact only a "luncheon meeting" - and the minutes state: "The main item on the agenda was the discussion of a letter of April 21, 1958, concerning the *Corpus Confessionum*"[12], i.e., the preparation of books containing the main confessional documents (this item remained on the agenda for only one more year). There was an exchange of information about the dates of major meetings of the various confessional groups, but the agenda was too weak and technical for a gathering of WCF representatives which was not limited to staff members, but also included officers of the participating organizations. It is worth noting that, for the first time, there was a representative from the Orthodox Church: Metropolitan James of Melita, the Geneva representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

27. Immediately after the Nyborg gathering, the Chairman, Dr. Lund-Quist, wrote to the Secretary of the World Methodist Council in Great Britain, Dr. E. Benson Perkins (who had been involved in all WCF meetings), with copies to all partici-

pating WCFs: "It seems quite clear after our experience in Nyborg that we have insufficient time to thoroughly discuss the items that are before us at these brief meetings. I would further agree with you that from our experience in Geneva in November 1957 such a conference as was then held could very profitably be planned for another ad hoc meeting."

28. Though the two streams, or types of gatherings, were merged for practical reasons, their special characteristics have been preserved. As had been proposed by Dr. Visser 't Hooft with regard to meetings of a technical and practical nature, the WCFs are represented by staff members. This explains why the annual meeting has become known as the Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families (it having been agreed from the outset that each delegation could consist of two to four participants). But the idea of larger meetings, which would allow for additional WCF representatives and be concerned with the role of the WCFs as individual organizations and as members of the ecumenical movement as a whole, has also been retained. Enlarged meetings of this kind are occasionally held in order to make up for the limited scope of the annual meetings of Secretaries.

29. The merger has resulted in advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, since participants consist solely of WCF general secretaries and some other staff members, the Conference has acquired a relatively small and stable structure which has led to the strengthening of useful personal contacts. On the other hand, it has no real impact on the various WCFs due to the fact that their governing bodies are not represented. The type of agenda adopted has enlarged the vision of the Conference, but the latter has no power to implement its findings.

30. Although the WCFs originally advocated the involvement of their governing boards, they have not pursued this request. The WCC had favored a meeting of a technical nature, but did not object to the Conference discussing questions of principle.

31. Was this solution an unsatisfactory compromise? Perhaps. At any rate, the Conference has been seriously handicapped from the very beginning, and this is perhaps the reason for the somewhat mixed feelings of participants at the close

of some meetings. Was not the Conference sometimes jokingly, but realistically, called "a kind of mixed bag"?

32. From the outset, the Conference was confronted with two difficulties: The first related to the task assigned to it. To accomplish this task would have required a greater involvement of the WCFs themselves, mainly through representation of their governing bodies. The second difficulty related to the fact that representation was too restricted to be adequate and effective since it was limited to general secretaries and some staff members.

THE MEETINGS

33. In the 20-year period 1957 to 1977, the Conference held 17 meetings - normally of three days' duration (see list in Appendix 1, p. 73). No meetings took place in 1960, 1961, and 1975.

34. It must have been difficult to find dates at intervals to suit all participants. From 1957 to 1963, meetings were held irregularly, and the Conference seemed to have difficulty in finding its cruising speed.

35. There have been four different kinds of meetings: First, the Yale 1957 and Nyborg 1958 meetings, which lasted only two or three hours and were held during WCC Central Committee meetings; second, the two- to three-day long "regular" meetings, the most numerous, which were characterized by their sharing and informative nature and were held in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva; third, the "enlarged" meetings of 1965, 1973, and 1974, whose agendas justified the presence of experts and leaders of the various families in addition to staff members; and fourth, the 1963 Consultation on World Confessionalism, which was organized by the WCC in cooperation with the WCFs. (The 1978 meeting was also of this latter kind.)

36. This classification is, of course, somewhat arbitrary. The first three types of meetings reveal an adjustment to circumstances and illustrate the necessity to deal with certain problems in a particular way. Throughout the years, there has been a conscious endeavor to move away from meetings of a purely informative nature. Although the unofficial character of the Conference certainly permits discussion of many problems of common interest, the Conference has been faced with the difficulty of proceeding from the level of discussion to the level of action.

There were, however, two or three occasions when discussion did bear fruit. The most obvious of these concerned the role of the WCFs in the ecumenical movement. This question, which arose in 1972 and continued through the Salamanca meeting of Faith and Order (1973) and the WCC Nairobi Assembly (1975), forced the WCC to reexamine its relation to the various WCFs, a task which was taken up by the WCC Executive Committee in February 1977. The October 1978 Consultation in Geneva was an attempt to bring all these elements together, not only for the benefit of the WCFs, but also for the benefit of the WCC, since the question of the relationship between the WCC and the WCFs was on the agenda of the Jamaica meeting of the WCC Central Committee (January 1979).

37. The organizational flexibility of the different types of WCF meetings shows that the Conference adopted a working method which would be informal rather than systematic or deliberate, and would be indirect and aimed at long-term, rather than immediate, objectives. The question remains whether it would not be appropriate to take steps to make the Conference more realistic and effective, while at the same time maintaining its unofficial and flexible character.

38. With the exception of the two gatherings during WCC Central Committee meetings (Yale, 1957, and Nyborg, 1958) and the London and Rome meetings (1976 and 1977, respectively), all meetings have been held in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. This is certainly the result of the decision taken at the outset that participants should include the general secretaries of those WCFs with which the *WCC* had relations. Of the seven constituting WCFs, three were located or had a representative in Great Britain, two in the USA, and only two in Geneva. It was thus the location in Geneva of the World Council of Churches which prompted the place of the meetings, and WCC representatives have always been in favor of maintaining this practice.

39. The question of another venue was discussed on several occasions, for instance, when it was decided that the small working group (which, together with the Chairman, prepares the work of the Conference) should consist mainly of representatives of London-based, and not only Geneva-based, organizations. But it was only in 1976 that the first meeting was held outside Geneva, i.e., in London. The decision to hold the 1977 meeting in Rome gave recognition to the

role played by the Roman Catholic Church. This rather recent decentralization illustrates increasing awareness of the importance of the different WCFs and their growing impact on the present ecumenical situation. The meetings are an indication of the WCFs role and task in the ecumenical movement.

40. The World Council of Churches New Delhi Assembly (November/December 1961) was the reason for the gap between the 1959 and 1962 meetings. There was to have been a meeting in April 1961, but those involved expressed concern that this would be too close to the New Delhi event. The correspondence shows that, with the exception of one member who was "a little disappointed" about the postponement, there was general agreement that this was the right decision.

41. From 1963 to 1974, the Conference met each year, first in October, later in November. It should be noted that the 1968 WCC Assembly in Uppsala did not cause another postponement, and the proximity of dates was not questioned. Maybe by that time the Conference had become sufficiently established to claim its place in the participants' rather full diaries.

42. But it seems to me that there may have been another, more important, reason for holding a meeting in 1968. In the preceding years, the question of relations with the Roman Catholic Church had gained tremendous importance, and the need to meet immediately after the Uppsala Assembly is reflected by the two main concerns on the agenda: the role of the WCFs in the ecumenical movement (introduced by Dr. E. Carson Blake, General Secretary of the WCC at that time); and the dialog with the Roman Catholic Church. For the first time, there was a representative of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity: Father Jerôme Hamer, then General Secretary.

43. The WCF meeting planned for November 1975 had to be postponed for several months because the dates coincided with those finally agreed upon for the WCC Nairobi Assembly.

THE PARTICIPANTS

44. The list of member organizations (see Appendix 2, p. 74) and the growing

number of participants at each meeting (cf. Appendix 1, p. 73) calls for some comments. Whereas 14 participants represented seven WCFs and the WCC in 1957, a total of 27 participants represented 14 organizations in 1976. The increase, in terms of both numbers of participants and WCFs involved, points to the interest generated by the Conference throughout the years.

45. The Disciples of Christ and the Ecumenical Patriarchate joined the seven original organizations during the first three years of the Conference's existence. In 1962, three more groups started to participate: the Salvation Army and the Old Catholics (both, thereafter, on a regular basis) and the Moscow Patriarchate (regularly as of 1967).

46. The General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists and the Roman Catholic Church (represented by the head of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity) have been participating since 1968; the Reformed Ecumenical Synod was represented first in 1968 and regularly as of 1973; the Mennonites joined in 1972; and the Brethren Service Commisson was represented in 1974.

47. Today, 16 organizations, churches, or confessional families are members of our Conference. In addition to the initiators of the Conference in 1957 - those WCFs which were in direct and constant dialog with the WCC - the constitutency now includes WCFs that are in dialog with each other on the world level, some organizations which are members of the WCC, and others which are in various degrees of contact with the WCC. As a result of this diversification of membership, the nature of the Conference has changed throughout the years.

48. Now that the number of participants has considerably increased, the small group of 1957 has developed into an assembly, which, though still modest in size, is larger than a working group. This has become increasingly evident since 1970. Whereas prior to that year meetings were - with one exception - attended by less than 25 people, this figure has always been exceeded in the present decade.

49. The four enlarged meetings were generally attended by 40 to 50 participants.

50. It is difficult to maintain the Conference as a non-structured working group

without, at the same time, condemning it to inefficiency. How can it continue to accomplish its task without a small working instrument? Although increased participation may mean that the Conference is in danger of losing its dynamism and substance, it is impossible to reduce the number of participants. Another solution must be sought.

51. Emphasis - both negative and positive, depending on the viewpoint applied - has often been placed on the diverse, and even dissimilar, interests represented by the members of the Conference. How can a new efficiency be injected into its work?

52. The ecumenical aspect of the Conference has been emphasized on several occasions. Its desire and will to be included in "the one ecumenical movement" is obvious. Any attempt - be it out of practical considerations or reasons of principle - to move away from this standpoint should be resisted. The remainder of this paper will serve to strengthen, rather than modify, this point of view.

53. Our Conference constitutes a very open and broad forum which makes it a unqiue body on the ecumenical scene. For many groups and churches it provides the only link to the ecumenical movement. Within the Conference itself there are various nuances of ecumenical commitment. A relatively large group of WCFs are involved in the important network of interconfessional conversations on the world level. Some WCFs have their headquarters, or a representative, in the Ecumenical Center. One organization, the Salvation Army, is a member of the WCC. Some are in contact with the various departments of the WCC; others take part in the meetings of our Conference and are in occasional contact with the WCC, but do not engage in constant dialog with the WCC or with any WCF. Some WCFs are more involved than others on the international and intercultural levels.

THE CONCERNS

54. Within the limitations of a paper like this it is obviously impossible to make a thorough evaluation of the results of the meetings. I shall therefore simply provide some factual information about the actions taken and studies made by our Conference in the last 20 years (cf. the chronological list of subjects in Appendix 3, pp. 75-77).

A. THE NAME OF THE GROUP

55. To start with, it seems to me of interest to look at the various names by which this group has been known.

56. Documents prepared by the group have often referred to the fact that there has never been a satisfactory name. The adjective "confessional" is confusing, since several constituent bodies do not require their members to subscribe to a particular confession of faith.

57. The following designations have been used - sometimes simultaneously: a) World Confessional Church Groups (1957, 1959); b) World Confessional Groups (1962, 1963, and 1964); c) World Confessional Bodies (1965, 1966, and 1967); and d) World Confessional Families (as of 1968).

58. The group's first attempt at self-definition took place in 1962 when it formulated what it called "a working definition of what 'confessional bodies' are": "We understand the term 'confessional bodies' as used in the Constitution of the WCC to mean the organizations which represent families of churches. While each of these bodies has its own specific conception of the nature of the link which binds its members together and of its role in the total ecumenical life of the churches, these bodies have this in common: a) that their member churches share together not only the general tradition which is common to all Christian churches, but also specific traditions which have grown out of spiritual crises in the history of the Church; and b) that they desire to render witness to those specific convictions of doctrinal or ecclesiological character which they consider to be essential for the life of the whole Church of Christ."[13]

59. In 1966, having ruled out the term "World Confessional Organizations", the group considered three possible names: World Confessional Bodies, World Families of Churches, and World Communions of Churches. The term "World Confessional Families" was finally adopted one year later.

60. Of the many discussions which surrounded or provoked consideration of a name for the group, one was concerned with the meaning of "confession" or " a confes-

sion". As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin said in 1962, "Were the churches to settle what they meant by confession, they would have settled the problem of Christian unity."[14] As a way out of this unsolved problem - and also in order to avoid confusion between "confessionalism" and "confessional movements" - it was once suggested that the group be named "World Fellowships of Churches".

61. Maybe the group will simply have to live with an inadequate name. This does not prevent the members from working together, but challenges them not to become self-satisfied. The 1977 WCC Executive Committee document is right when it states that the term "World Confessional Families" is "a shorthand term for a complex reality"[15].

B. INFORMATION

62. From the outset, the sharing of information has been one of the main - if not the major - concern of the WCF Conferences. Even though it has not always been treated in a satisfactory manner, it is a subject to which the Conference has devoted a large part of its time each year.

63. At the very first meeting (November 1957), Dr. Hans Heinrich Harms (who then represented the WCC Division of Studies) proposed a publication containing all major confessional documents. The reactions of the WCF representatives were marked by interest as well as embarrassment. Although it was felt that such a publication (to be entitled *Corpus Confessionum*) would be useful and welcomed by all members, a three-year discussion of the subject was inconclusive. Since some of the documents were already available in different confessional publications, it was felt that the preparation of such a publication (which would probably consist of several volumes) would require too much work for the WCFs to become involved. In 1959, the Conference was informed that the prospective publisher was proposing a meeting of a group of experts representing all WCFs. To my knowledge, this was the end of the project.

64. The minutes of almost all gatherings do contain rather detailed reports on the work, plans, and meetings of the participating WCFs, but this is not an entirely fruitful way of sharing information. Although the participants are grate-

ful for the reports, which provide them with an opportunity to raise questions and make comments, this process of sharing information does not have any tangible results.

65. Between 1964 and 1967, once the Conference had organized itself more adequately (appointed a Chairman and Secretary - for two year terms - and a small working group to help the Chairman prepare the various meetings), two interesting attempts were made to make this kind of information more useful.

66. The first took the form of a "WCF self-study": A questionnaire was sent to all participating families in 1964, and the replies were assembled in a mimeographed document which was circulated the following year. The second was a "WCF directory": This project was adopted in 1966, and the Secretary was assigned the task of keeping the information up-to-date. In 1967, information concerning the life of the various WCFs was collected by the Secretary and sent to all participants in advance of the meeting. This was certainly the best way of dealing with the matter, but the attempt was not repeated. Why? Perhaps those who were supposed to prepare a written document were reluctant to add this task to their many other duties. Perhaps the Secretary himself felt that this was too much to ask of him. Maybe it is, in fact, too much to ask someone to prepare such a document simply to add to the minutes.

67. A satisfactory method of disseminating information has never been developed. According to some of the minutes, there have always been difficulties of communication, both among the group and with the World Council. This also applies to the Conference's regular reporting on specific issues. Since 1959, the question of religious liberty has regularly appeared on the agenda, but progress reports on this issue could be handled in a slightly different way.

C. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

68. During the first ten years of its existence, the Conference carefully followed the development of ecumenical relationships involving the Roman Catholic Church. At each meeting between 1957 and 1965 (i.e., on six occasions), Dr. Visser 't Hooft presented a report on developments and pleaded for close coopera-

tion on the part of the various WCFs.

69. When it became known that the Roman Catholic Church planned to invite observers from various organizations to attend the Second Vatican Council, Dr. Visser 't Hooft made arrangements for Mgr. Willebrands, then Secretary of the newly-formed Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, to attend the 1962 WCF meeting. Mgr. Willebrands explained what was expected of non-Roman Catholic observers at the Council and suggested that these observers be named by the WCFs. It was agreed that those WCFs wishing to receive an invitation would inform Mgr. Willebrands.

70. In 1964, the WCC Executive Committee adopted "A Working Paper on the Basis of Cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church"[16], which proposed the formation of what was then called "a joint commission" (later renamed: working group) between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the WCC. Presenting this document to the WCF Conference, Dr. Visser 't Hooft emphasized that "in any future procedures that might be adopted it is important that there be participation by representatives of the confessional bodies"[17]. One recalls the historic occasion (February 18, 1965) when Cardinal Bea announced in the hall of the Ecumenical Center in Geneva: "The Holy See greets with joy and willingly accepts the proposal made by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches to set up a mixed committee ... to explore together the possibilities of dialogue and collaboration between the World Council and the Roman Catholic Church."[18] Since that working group, which started work in May 1965, included some WCF participants, it is surprising that this subject has not figured on any subsequent WCF agenda - even as a brief item of information.

71. A second phase of relations began in 1968 when the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was represented at a WCF meeting. Since then, a representative of this Secretariat has played an important role in all meetings, and it has therefore been unnecessary to keep the question of the relationship between the WCF Conference and the Roman Catholic Church on subsequent agendas.

72. The fact that an important network of interconfessional conversations, in which the Roman Catholic Church is involved on the world level, has developed

in recent years reveals how seriously the Roman Catholic Church is taking the role of the various WCFs. In this field, too, the WCC and the WCFs complement each other on the ecumenical scene. Pope Paul VI's statement to WCF observers at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council is indicative of the new situation that has developed: "We have begun to know you a little better, and not only as representatives of your respective Churches; through you, we have made contact with Christian Communities who live, pray, and act in the name of Christ.... This increases ... our desire to restore the perfect communion of all people which Christ wished to establish".[19]

D. UNITED CHURCHES

73. The 1975 Toronto meeting of the United Churches, which was organized in co-operation with the WCC Faith and Order Secretariat to mark the 25th anniversary of the United Church of Canada, pointed to a change of attitude with regard to United Churches. Representatives of the Toronto Continuation Committee were present at an informal gathering of WCF representatives who were in Nairobi for the 1975 WCC Assembly; and at the 1976 WCF annual meeting the Rev. Martin H. Cressey, one of the Toronto Continuation Committee delegates, presented a paper entitled "United Churches and the WCFs"[20]. This led the group to recognize that "further discussion with, and a possible response, to the United Churches is required"[21]. The many tasks facing the Conference prompted the working group to propose that this matter be tabled for the 1978 Conference.

74. But this was hardly a new concern for our Conference. In his first presentation to the group in 1957, Dr. Visser 't Hooft raised the question of the WCFs' attitude toward "union churches" and "churches thinking of uniting". In the ensuing discussion it became evident that the different WCFs had no intention of hindering church union negotiations, but the fear was expressed that unions on a national level, without international links, "might tend to form national blocks which would be worse than confessionalism"[22].

75. In 1959, the attitude was more positive. Each WCF described its own position regarding the question of church union, and it was clearly stated that WCFs "generally encourage their affiliates to participate in church union moves"[23].

76. In the light of criticisms expressed by the 1961 Bangalore meeting of the East Asia Christian Conference, and as a reaction to the New Delhi statement about "unity in each place"[24], it was underlined, in 1962, that world "confessional organizations have functioned as channels of communication ... rather than as creators of obstacles where none previously existed", and that, very often, local churches were less ecumenically minded than the WCFs when they had to decide about church unions. The WCFs do tend to see themselves "as an alternative to the goal of unity in each place".[25]

77. In 1963, Dr. Visser 't Hooft raised the problem of "multiple membership of churches composed of various confessional groups"[26], a question to which some WCFs had already reacted positively.

78. At the 1972 meeting, Dr. Lukas Vischer delivered a major lecture on "Concepts of Unity and Models of Union"[27], as a kind of preparation for the 1973 Faith and Order Conference on concepts of unity. A rather lengthy discussion underlined some aspects of this theme: conciliarity, the gulf between unity at the local and world levels, etc.

E. MISSION

79. The question of mission twice appeared as a major item on WCF agendas. At the 1963 WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, the first lecture (presented by Principal C.H. Hwang, now Dr. Shoki Coe, on the theme of the Consultation, "Freedom and Responsibility for Confession and Unity in the Indigenous Church"[28]) emphasized the necessity for mission, unity, and truth to be considered together. The way Principal Hwang spoke of mission ("through involvement in mission the churches would be renewed and discover a deeper and wider unity"[29]) made a profound impression on all participants.

80. Along the same line was Bishop Newbigin's presentation on "Joint Action for Mission": "We should try to see our total task together so that, whether things have to be done by individual churches or churches acting together in a common enterprise, they should be regarded equally as the responsibility of all, as part of the common task undertaken in fulfilment of the Church's mission in the

locality."[30]

81. Dr. D. T. Niles added: "We must move from the stage where the younger church decides what it wants and the missionary society gives it, to the stage where the churches in the East and the West decide together what is wanted and then stand by one another in doing it."[31]

82. As a result of the discussion at this Consultation, an enlarged WCF meeting was held in 1965 under the theme "Engagement in the Mission and Unity of the Church". Several lectures were delivered during this two-day meeting.

83. It is of interest that the meeting referred a number of concerns and questions to the WCF general secretaries who were in session the following day. The publishing of the statement adopted by this joint consultation in the *Ecumenical Review*[32] (on the request of Dr. Visser 't Hooft) reflected the desire of all participants "to share with a wider circle the results of their deliberations"[33]. The document opens with the afore-mentioned working definition of confessional bodies, and the affirmation that world confessions are not the final expression of the church and that it is therefore "premature" and "unrealistic" to "think and act as if the fully ecumenical age had been reached"[34].

84. This statement raised two categories of questions: a) questions of principle, which dealt with the way the church confessed Christ in its witness and structure at a time when purely confessional positions had to be reconsidered; and b) questions of function, pertaining to the nature and role of WCFs in the current situation and the significance of their development for the future of the conciliar ecumenical movement, as well as to the place and role of the various missionary agencies and the establishment of criteria for responsible partnership in this field. In the conclusion it is stated: "We realize that we are only at the beginning of a conversation which may have far-reaching consequences for the churches both in their confessional and [in] their ecumenical relationships."[35]

F. INTER-CHURCH AID

85. At the first meeting in 1957, it was requested that there be "an exchange of

views on the whole problem of inter-church aid in order to come to a more unified policy on the part of the confessional groups"[36]. Two different points of view were presented: There was emphasis, on the one hand, on the importance of ecumenical action across confessional lines without suppressing responsibility toward member churches of the same confessional family; on the other hand, there was recognition of the responsibility toward member churches of the same confessional family - which are not all members of the WCC - without prejudicing ecumenical action! These two standpoints appear to be very close, but the difference in emphasis moves them far apart.

86. The question of inter-church aid was again raised in a paper adopted by the WCC Executive Committee in February 1977 ("Toward a New Relationship with World Confessional Families"). After describing the present situation - unchanged since 1957 - this paper concludes that "there are important issues here that need attention"[37]. But this does not mean that nothing had been accomplished in the meantime! There are many needs. Millions and millions had been distributed in the intervening 20 years. We are, however, still faced with the problem how to improve WCF cooperation in the field of inter-church aid.

87. The 1959 Conference "agreed that the WCC Department of Inter-Church Aid should call together at an early date a meeting of representatives of the major confessional groups to consult on these questions"[38]. This meeting was held in early 1960.

88. The WCFs and the WCC should now focus their attention on two specific tasks: they should: a) increase collaboration between the inter-church aid officers of the WCFs and their opposite numbers on the WCC staff; and b) face the challenge presented by the fact that their uncoordinated ways of carrying out inter-church aid are reinforcing confessional divisions more on the level of finances than on the level of confessing Christ. This is one of the sharpest criticisms leveled against the WCFs, especially by Third World churches.

G. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

89. This is another field where cooperation is possible. There are many con-

tacts between the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) and the confessional offices. There are also some direct links since CCIA is anxious that its Commission include people who can serve as liaison officers to the WCFs. This useful pattern should be put into even more effective practice.

H. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

90. To what has already been said on this subject under the heading of "Information", it should be added that this has been a concern of the Conference from the very outset. Throughout the 1960s, the question of religious liberty as it concerned relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches was closely studied.

91. In 1970, Dr. Leopoldo Niilus presented a paper on "Religious Liberty and Human Rights"[39]. At the same meeting Dr. Lukas Vischer stressed: "We need ... to insist on it [religious liberty] even more strongly than before. But perhaps more than before this should be done in the overall context of human rights.... It must be recognized that many aspects of religious liberty ... become meaningless if other human rights are not effectively and realistically safe-guarded."[40] As requested by the Conference, Dr. Pierre Lanarès (General Secretary, International Religious Liberty Association) has been responsible for annual reporting on this subject since 1971.

I. BIBLE SOCIETIES

92. In 1972, in response to papers presented by the Rev. John C. Weller, World Service Officer of the United Bible Societies ("The Relationship between the Bible Societies and the World Confessional Families in the Light of the Role of the Bible Today"[41]) and Dr. Hans-Ruedi Weber ("The Work of Bible Societies, Biblical Interpretation, and the Confession of Faith"[42]), the Conference received several recommendations concerning ways of improving relationships between the United Bible Societies and the WCFs. However, in 1973, the WCF working group agreed that this matter should be handled by the individual churches rather than on the world level.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WCC AND THE WCFs

93. During the 20 years of its existence, the WCF Conference's main concern has been the question of ecumenical commitment. This concern has found expression at every WCF meeting, either in a practical way or in connection with the discussion of a specific problem. The WCFs regard themselves as being involved in the ecumenical movement together with the WCC. And if the present formal relationship does not fully reflect the sharing of an ultimate goal, this is mainly due to the fact that the WCC is a well-organized institution whereas the WCFs are many loosely associated organizations. The many papers presented throughout the years bear witness to the ecumenical commitment of the WCFs. Their latest (1974) position paper is entitled: "The Ecumenical Role of the World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement"[43].

94. How can the relationship between the WCFs and the WCC be described? It has varied considerably throughout the years. The WCC welcomed the creation of the WCF Conference and played an important role in its formation. Since the Bangalore and Bangkok statements of the East Asia Christian Conference addressed certain criticisms to the WCFs, the WCC, at the request of our Conference, called the 1963 Consultation on World Confessionalism.

95. That cooperation between the WCC and the WCFs has been useful has often been emphasized. Speaking at the 1968 Conference on "The Role of the WCFs in the Ecumenical Movement after Uppsala", Dr. E. Carson Blake (then General Secretary of the WCC) said: "I hope we have all passed the stage of a few years ago of generally critical attitudes towards the confessional organisations as such, even to calling them anti-ecumenical."[44] Many WCC documents reflect the same attitude. To quote the WCC Nairobi Assembly: "In the past, this difference has often led to tensions and conflicts. However, in recent years, changes have taken place which may lead to a new relationship between the WCC and the World Confessional Families."[45]

96. However, a few people have dared to point out that these relationships are not really as perfect and cooperative as could be expected. In 1969, in his paper on "The Commitment of the WCFs to the Ecumenical Movement", David M. Paton

wrote: "The relationship with the WCC is, or at any rate has been, characterized by some mutual embarrassment."[46] There are many reasons for embarrassment. The WCC and the WCFs have so much in common that they sometimes appear to be - and sometimes may be - in competition with one another. There are many historical tensions, and possible areas of cooperation have sometimes been ignored. The loose character of the WCF Conference has made it difficult, if not impossible, to proceed beyond the level of general declarations of intent.

97. It seems fair to say that both points of view are probably valid. The co-operation between the WCC and the WCFs has been useful, but not as useful as it could have been. Looking back on the experience of the past 20 years, the main intention of this paper is to attempt to define areas where these relationships could be improved to the benefit of the one ecumenical movement.

98. The WCFs have been criticized. "However good the intention, it seems that the expression of world confessionalism, in increasingly complex institutional structures, results in the perpetuation and reinforcement of patterns of paternalism and continued exercise of control."[47] In 1963, the WCC Youth Department wrote that "the tendency of the confessional institutions is to encourage self-sufficiency among denominational groups and to reinforce exclusiveness."[48] Although these criticisms have been repeated in several circles, they have probably not been closely studied. On the other hand, the WCFs may have been too sensitive to such criticisms and may not have made a sufficient effort to read between the lines. Also, they have been so bound up in their own affairs that they have not responded as a group to what was more a challenge than a criticism.

99. What form should relations take? In 1948, it was decided that the WCC would be a council of *churches*, and that confessional links would not play an official role. Dr. Visser 't Hooft refers to the mood at the end of an evening during the WCC Amsterdam Assembly (1948) which was devoted to meetings of the various confessional bodies. "Nearly all reported that they had been told that their confession was really the centre of the ecumenical movement and that the other confessions would discover that some day."[49] Commenting on this, Dr. Visser 't Hooft rightly shows that there were two possible reactions, one negative ("the inevitable reaction of church bodies who sought to reassure themselves at the

time when each confession found itself suddenly confronted with the question of its own future in an ecumenical age") and the other positive ("it could also mean ... that each confession had something essential to give to the ecumenical community").[50] At the very first WCF meeting in 1957, one participant suggested that the WCFs should claim official status at WCC Assemblies so that their representatives could attend as full delegates. This proposal was, however, not accepted by the group.

100. In an article entitled "World Confessionalism and Ecumenical Strategy", the Rev. Lewis S. Mudge summarized the policy of the Conference: "Let it be stressed that we do not want and do not need any new organizational machinery: either in the form of a council of confessional groups, or in the form of a special category of membership for confessional groups as such in the World Council.... We need only to realize in practice the implications of the insight that ecumenical responsibility is something we all share."[51] It is worth noting that the same position was held by the WCC committee which reviewed structures in the late 1960s.

101. On at least two occasions, the Conference has made proposals concerning relations with the WCC. In 1963, the following recommendations were adopted by the WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism: that the WCC convene biannual meetings of WCC officers; that a day be reserved for such a meeting during each WCC "Week of Meetings"; and that the aim of these meetings be to involve more WCF officers in the departmental and divisional committees of the WCC. In 1969, the following resolution was adopted: "The Conference of Secretaries of WCFs ... expresses the hope that the next step in the present development may be that of increasing the consultative role of the WCFs vis-à-vis the WCC, and believes that the instrumentality for playing such a role exists in the Conference of Secretaries."[52]

102. The 1973 memorandum reacting to the Faith and Order Salamanca document echoes this feeling: "We recognize a new need for cooperation between the WCFs themselves, and between them and the WCC."[53] It is to be hoped that this kind of concern will be considered when the WCC Central Committee reopens the question of these relationships in the years to come.

103. It is interesting to note the way in which the WCC has been involved in our

Conference over the years: The period from 1957 to 1965 was marked by a common search for appropriate action. The WCC General Secretary, Dr. Visser 't Hooft, played a leading role in all meetings during this period; and some were prepared by the Rev. H.A. Hamilton, WCC Associate General Secretary. These meetings studied all aspects of the life of the WCC in the light of a common responsibility in the one ecumenical movement.

104. Three factors brought about changes in the period from 1966 to 1972. First, on the administrative level, the decision to form a small committee composed exclusively of WCF representatives made the WCFs more conscious of their involvement in the Conference, but at the same time led to decreased involvement on the part of the WCC General Secretariat. (Dr. Blake took part in only two meetings during his term of office.) Second, the Roman Catholic Church joined the Conference as of 1968. Third, the expansion of interconfessional conversations in the 1960s led to increased involvement on the part of the WCC Faith and Order Secretariat. Dr. Lukas Vischer has been present at all meetings since 1966, and the Faith and Order Secretariat has often used the WCF Conference as a sounding board for some of its major studies. The publication of *Confessions in Dialogue*[54] was initiated during this period.

105. 1973, the beginning of the present period, saw the introduction of a study on the role of the WCFs in the present ecumenical situation. The 1973 Salamanca Consultation, the WCC Nairobi Assembly (1975), and the February 1977 WCC Executive Committee meeting prompted reconsideration of relationships between the WCC and the WCFs. This was a major item on the agenda of the Jamaica meeting of the WCC Central Committee (early 1979).

106. May I close this résumé of WCC/WCF relationships by adopting a phrase from a paper presented by Dr. Philip Potter (then Chairman of the World Student Christian Federation) to the WCC New Delhi Assembly (1961): "I appreciate that this is a delicate matter demanding much good will and determination on both sides."[55]

NOTES

1. After having read this essay, Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft sent me a letter in which he refers to the "pre-history" of the Conference of WCFs and mentions the discussions of the 1938 Utrecht Conference. He adds that, concerning the period in which he himself participated, he is in agreement with my study.

2. *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954*, ed. W.A. Visser 't Hooft (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1955), pp. 184-185.

3. "The World Presbyterian Alliance in the Present Ecumenical Situation", *The Reformed and Presbyterian World*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, March 1962, p. 14.

4. *Proceedings of the Seventeenth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian Order held at Princeton, N.J., USA, 1954*, ed. Marcel Pradervand (Geneva: Office of the Alliance, 1954), pp. 109-120.

5. ibid., p. 37.

6. Minutes of the WARC (then usually called the World Presbyterian Alliance) Executive Committee, Prague, August 7-11, 1956, p. 6.

7. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press Ltd. / Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p. 324.

8. *The Reformed and Presbyterian World*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, September 1956, pp. 107-108.

9. ibid., pp. 110-111.

10. Minutes of the WARC Executive Committee, Stony Point, USA, August 8-13, 1957, p. 20.

11. Seven WCFs are listed: Baptist World Alliance, Friends World Committee for Consultation, International Congregational Council, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, World Convention of Churches of Christ, World Presbyterian Alliance. According to the report given by Dr. Mackay to the WARC Executive Committee in 1957, these organizations were probably present at the Yale meeting.

12. Minutes, World Confessional Church Groups, Nyborg Strand, Denmark, August 22, 1958.

13. Minutes, World Confessional Groups, Geneva, April 3-4, 1962, p. 5.

14. ibid., p. 3. See also *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, p. 34,

and *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, January 1966, p. 91.

15. "Toward a New Relationship with World Confessional Families", *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978, p. 47; *WCC Exchange*, No. 3/1, July 1977, p. 2.

16. Minutes, World Confessional Groups, Geneva, October 16-17, 1964, Appendix 1.

17. Minutes, World Confessional Groups, Geneva, October, 1964, p. 2.

18. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, p. 334. Cf. also "Cardinal Bea's Visit to Geneva", *Lutheran World*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 1965, p. 149.

19. Augustin Cardinal Bea, *The Way to Unity after the Council* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), p. 13.

20. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, London, May 10-12, 1976, Appendix.

21. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, London, 1976, p. 5.

22. Minutes, World Confessional Church Groups, Geneva, November 14-15, 1957, p. 6.

23. Minutes, World Confessional Church Groups, Geneva, November 24-25, 1959, p. 13.

24. See the report of the Section on Unity, *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961*, ed. W.A. Visser 't Hooft (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), pp. 116-134.

25. Lewis S. Mudge, "The World Confessional Bodies and the Ecumenical Movement", Minutes, World Confessional Groups, Geneva, April 3-4, 1962, Appendix, pp. 12-13. Cf. also "The World Confessional Families and Ecumenical Relationships", *Lutheran World*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, pp. 49 and 50.

26. Proceedings, WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, Geneva, October 2-5 1963 (confidential at that time), p. 45.

27. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 27-29, 1972, pp. 9-12.

28. Proceedings, WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, 1963, pp. 1-6.

29. ibid., p. 7.

30. ibid., p. 38.

31. ibid., p. 7.

32. "Statement of a Joint Consultation concerning Confessional Movements and Mission and Unity", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, January 1966, pp. 91-96, and *Lutheran World*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1966, pp. 192-196.

33. ibid., pp. 91 and 193, resp.

34. ibid., pp. 92 and 193, resp.

35. ibid., pp. 96 and 196, resp.

36. Minutes, World Confessional Church Groups, Geneva, November 14-15, 1957, p. 5.

37. *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978, p. 53; *WCC Exchange*, No. 3/1, July 1977, p. 6.

38. Minutes, World Confessional Church Groups, Geneva, November 24-25, 1959, p. 22.

39. *The Reformed and Presbyterian World*, Vol. 31, No. 5, March 1971, pp. 195-202.

40. "A New Departure in dealing with the Problem of Religious Liberty", Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 18-20, 1970, Exhibit III.1, p. 4.

41. Cf. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 27-29, 1972, p. 1.

42. Cf. ibid., pp. 2-3.

43. *WCC Exchange*, No. 3/2, July 1977.

44. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 20-22, 1968, Appendix 3, p. 9.

45. *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November - 10 December, 1975*, ed. David M. Paton (London: SPCK / Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 195-196.

46. Paper for the Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 19-21, 1969, p. 1.

47. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Enlarged Continuation Committee of the East Asia Christian Conference held at Bangalore, India, 7-12 November, 1961* (Jaffna, Sri Lanka: St. Joseph's Catholic Press, n.d.), p. 38.

48. Proceedings, WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism, p. 41.

49. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, p. 211.

50. ibid.

51. *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4, July 1959, p. 393.

52. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 19-21, 1969, Appendix 7, p. 1.

53. Minutes, Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families, Geneva, November 26-28, 1973, Appendix, p. 1.

54. Nils Ehrenström/Günther Gassmann, *Confessions in Dialogue: A Survey of Bilateral Conversations Among World Confessional Families 1959-1974* (Third, revised and enlarged edition by Nils Ehrenström [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975]).

55. "Going Forward Together into Manifest Unity", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, April 1962, p. 349.

APPENDIX 1

MEETINGS OF WORLD CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES: 1957 - 1978

(1957 August 1: Yale Divinity School, New Haven, USA)

1957 November 14-15: Geneva, Switzerland: *14 participants*

1958 August 22 (during WCC Central Committee meeting): Nyborg, Denmark: *14 participants*

1959 November 24-25: Geneva, Switzerland: *25 participants*

1962 April 3-4: Geneva, Switzerland: *25 participants*

1963 October 2-5 (WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism): Geneva, Switzerland: *49 participants*

1964 October 16-17: Geneva, Switzerland: *28 participants*

1965 October 12-14 (enlarged): Geneva, Switzerland: *48 participants*

1966 October 12-13: Geneva, Switzerland: *23 participants*

1967 October 19-20: Geneva, Switzerland: *17 participants*

1968 November 20-22: Geneva, Switzerland: *23 participants*

1969 November 19-21: Geneva, Switzerland: *25 participants*

1970 November 18-20: Geneva, Switzerland: *26 participants*

1971 November 29 - December 1: Geneva, Switzerland: *27 participants*

1972 November 27-29: Geneva, Switzerland: *26 participants*

1973 November 26-28 (enlarged): Geneva, Switzerland: *35 participants*

1974 November 9-12 (enlarged, November 9-11): Geneva, Switzerland: *47 participants*

1976 May 10-12: London, England: *27 participants*

1977 May 16-18: Rome, Italy: *33 participants*

1978 October 23-26 (World Confessional Families / World Council of Churches Joint Consultation, October 23-25): Geneva, Switzerland: *48 participants*

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AT WCF CONFERENCES: 1957 - 1978

Anglican Consultative Council: *All meetings, except 1962*

Baptist World Alliance: *All meetings, except 1976*

Lutheran World Federation: *All meetings*

World Methodist Council: *All meetings*

International Congregational Council: *All meetings 1957-1969* (As of 1970, united with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches)

World Alliance of Reformed Churches: *All meetings*

Friends World Committee for Consultation: *All meetings*

Disciples: World Convention of Church of Christ / Ecumenical Consultative Council: *All meetings 1958-1978, except 1964*

Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople: *All meetings 1958-1963; 1966-1974; and 1977-1978*

Salvation Army: *All meetings 1962-1978*

International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference: *All meetings 1962-1965; 1967-1971; and 1973-1977*

Moscow Patriarchate: *1962; 1967-1968; 1970-1978*

Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Roman Catholic Church: *1968-1969; 1971-1978*

General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists: *All meetings 1968-1978*

Reformed Ecumenical Synod: *1968; 1973-1978*

Mennonite World Conference: *All meetings 1972-1978*

Brethren Service Commission: *1974*

Pentecostal World Conference: *1959 and 1962*

World Council of Churches: *All meetings*

NB: No meetings were held in 1960, 1961, and 1975

APPENDIX 3

MAIN SUBJECTS STUDIED: 1957 - 1978

1957: Contributions of Confessions to ecumenical life (especially to the WCC): Introduction by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft. Relationship of the World Confessions to the WCC. Relationship of the World Confessions to schemes of national or other unions.

1958: Corpus Confessionum.

1959: Corpus Confessionum. World Confessional Groups and United Churches. Contacts with the Roman Catholic Church: Introduction by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft and Dr. Hans Heinrich Harms. Interchurch aid - a confessional and ecumenical responsibility.

1962: Contacts with the Roman Catholic Church: Introduction by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft; Mgr. Jan Willebrands on the Second Vatican Council. "World Confessional Groups and the Ecumenical Movement" by the Rev. Lewis S. Mudge; "The World Confessional Families and the Ecumenical Movement" by Dr. Kurt Schmidt-Clausen; "'World Confessionalism' and the Ecumenical Movement" by Dr. Norman Goodall.

1963: (WCC Consultation on World Confessionalism) Addresses on the main theme ("Freedom and Responsibility for Confession and Unity in the Indigenous Church") by Principal C.H. Hwang and Dr. Arne Sovik. "Montreal and Confessionalism" by the Rev. Robert A. Nelson and the Rev. Patrick C. Rodger. Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church.

1964: Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Confessional Families and the churches in Asia. Interchurch aid and the Confessional Groups. WCF self-study. Relationship with conservative evangelical groups.

1965: Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church: Introduction by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft. "Missionary Responsibility in the Anglican Communion" by Canon John V. Taylor. "Dilemmas of World Confessional Groups with respect to Engagement in Mission and Unity" by Dr. Paul C. Empie. "Engagement in the Mission and Unity of the Church" by Dr. Wilhelm Niesel. "Mission, Unity, World Methodism, and a Board of Missions" by Dr. Tracey K. Jones, Jr. Relationship with conservative evangelical groups.

1966: "The Place and Task of Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" by Dr. Lukas Vischer. Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. WCF directory.

1967: "Confessing the Faith in Asia Today": Discussion of the statement issued by the East Asia Christian Conference, Hong Kong, 1966. Cooperation between the WCC and the World Confessional Bodies: "The Place of World Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" by Dr. Lukas Vischer. Dialog with the Roman Catholic Church and its consequences for the WCFs. Union negotiations.

1968: Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church: Evaluation of a questionnaire circulated among the WCFs. The WCC dialog with the Roman Catholic Church: Introduction by Dr. Lukas Vischer. "Neglected Factors Influencing Unity" by Mgr. Emilianos Timiadis. "The Role of the WCFs in the Ecumenical Movement after Uppsala" by Dr. E. Carson Blake.

1969: "The Commitment of the WCFs to the Ecumenical Movement" by Canon David M. Paton; reaction by Bishop Paul Neff Garber. Evaluation of bilateral dialogs. Religious liberty. Structural relationship between the WCFs and the WCC: Introduction by Dr. Andrē Appel.

1970: "National Loyalties - A Help or a Hindrance to World Fellowship: Some Reflections" by Dr. Stanley J. Samartha. "Religious Liberty and Human Rights" by Dr. Leopoldo Niilus; "A New Departure in Dealing with the Problem of Religious Liberty" by Dr. Lukas Vischer. Project: Evaluation of bilateral dialogs (Dr. Günther Gassmann and Professor Nils Ehrenström). Union negotiations (following the WCC Faith and Order Commission's Conference on Church Union Negotiations, Limuru, Kenya, April 1970). WCC structural changes and the WCFs.

1971: Bilateral dialogs (Dr. Günther Gassmann and Professor Nils Ehrenström). Religious liberty: Report by Dr. Pierre Lanarês.

1972: "The Relationship between the Bible Societies and the World Confessional Families in the Light of the Role of the Bible Today" by the Rev. John C. Weller, United Bible Societies. "The Work of Bible Societies, Biblical Interpretation, and the Confession of Faith" by Dr. Hans Ruedi Weber. *Confessions in Dialogue.* "Concepts of Unity and Models of Union" by Dr. Lukas Vischer. Religious liberty: Report by Dr. Pierre Lanarês.

1973: The role of the WCFs today: Report on WCF answers to a questionnaire by Dr.

B.B. Beach; "The Role of World Confessional Families in the Ecumenical Movement" by Professor Nils Ehrenström; "Unity Concepts in Bilateral Dialogues" by Professor Nils Ehrenström. Religious Liberty: "A Survey of the Current Situation of Religious Liberty in the World" by Dr. Pierre Lanarès; "Religious Liberty in Accordance with the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church" by Mgr. Jean-François Arrighi; "The Relationship between the Orthodox Church and other Churches where the Orthodox Church is in the Majority as far as this affects the Religious Liberty Situation in Europe" by Professor Ion Bria. *Confessions in Dialogue.*

1974: Bilateral dialogs: "Aspects and Perspectives of Bilateral Dialogues" by Father Pierre Duprey, reaction by Bishop William R. Cannon; "Bilateral Dialogues and Theological Advance" by Professor Joseph C. McLelland, reaction by Professor Ion Bria; "The Future of Bilaterals and the Bilaterals of the Future" by Dr. Harding Meyer. Religious liberty: Report by Dr. Pierre Lanarès. "The Ecumenical Role of the World Confessional Families in the One Ecumenical Movement": Adoption of a statement.

1976: "United Churches and the WCFs" by the Rev. Martin H. Cressey. Faith and Order matters (prayer; baptism, eucharist, ministry; advisory group; forum for dialogs). "World Confessional Families and the World Council of Churches" by Dr. George A. Lindbeck. Religious liberty: Report by Dr. Pierre Lanarès.

1977: "Towards a New Relationship with World Confessional Families" (WCC Executive Committee document). "The Conference of Secretaries of World Confessional Families: 1957-1977" by Dr. Edmond Perret; reactions by the Rev. Joe Hale, Mgr. Charles Moeller, and Dr. Carl H. Mau. "Partnership in Mission" by the Rev. David Chaplin. Religious liberty: Report by Dr. Pierre Lanarès. Papal audience for WCF Secretaries.

1978: "Basic Theological Concerns of World Confessional Families" by Dr. Harding Meyer. Report on the April 1978 Forum by the Rev. Stephen Cranford. "Ecumenical Partnership in Mission" by the Rev. David Chaplin. WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Melbourne Conference ("Your Kingdom Come"). Review of conversations between the WCC and the WCFs (October 23-25, 1978).

APPENDIX 4

1979 WCC CENTRAL COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO THE 1978 WCC/WCF CONSULTATION

The following is an extract (item VII) of the report of the Reference Committee on the General Secretariat, as approved by the WCC Central Committee, Kingston, Jamaica, January 1979.

CONSULTATION WITH WORLD CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES

The Committee on the General Secretariat had reviewed the report on the consultation between the WCC and the World Confessional Families on their relationships, held October 23-25, 1978[1]. This consultation was a response to the call of the Fifth Assembly for a re-examination of these relationships.

On the recommendation of the Committee on the General Secretariat, the Central Committee *agreed:*

1. That the report and the development that it signals be welcomed, recognizing that the report was not a final document but represented a general consensus among the Consultation participants, to be read as a step in an ongoing study.

2. To affirm the conviction expressed in the report "that the WCC and the WCFs are called to play together constructive and complementary roles in the search for the visible unity of the Church, in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship".

3. That the recognition in the report of the fact "that the WCC is ... the most nearly comprehensive instrument of the ecumenical movement in the world today ... [and] is the only forum where all aspects of the ecumenical movement have the opportunity to encounter one another" be welcomed.

4. That, recognizing the importance of the role of the World Confessional Families, it welcome the commitment to the ecumenical movement which several of them have explicitly expressed.

5. That the establishment of the Forum on Bilateral Dialogs, convened by the Secretariat on Faith and Order on the request of the World Confessional Families be welcomed, and that the Central Committee commend the initial accomplishments of

that Forum.

6. To express its general approval of the suggestions made in the report of further steps that might be taken, such as:

a) joint efforts by the WCFs and the Faith and Order Commission, seeking to find a common expression of the one faith we share;

b) assistance by the WCFs to the WCC in procuring and evaluating responses to the consensus study on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry;

c) engaging in a fresh reflection on the question of authority, tradition, and creeds, and looking together at the relation of "consensus" to "koinonia";

d) seeking measures to ensure adequate participation of the WCFs in the programmatic studies of the Faith and Order Commission;

e) giving attention to ways in which closer collaboration between the WCFs and the WCC can be realized in the fields of dialog/consultation, social services, and the sharing of resources;

f) providing a survey and assessment by the Conference of Secretaries of WCFs and the CWME [Commission on World Mission and Evangelism] and CICARWS [Commission for Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service] of what is being done separately and together in the area of witness and service as a first step in exploring ways and means of achieving a greater measure of common witness and service;

g) involvement of the WCFs in the preparation of the 1980 CWME Conference on the theme "Your Kingdom Come";

h) collaboration by the WCFs in the CCIA [Commission of the Churches on International Affairs] study on Human Rights and consideration of the possibility of establishing a joint monitoring committee on religious liberty; and

i) consideration of ways of improving WCC/WCF collaboration in the areas of education, international affairs, proclamation, communication, studies, and other activities.

7. To request that ways be explored whereby the WCFs might assist the WCC in the task of communicating with WCC member churches which belong to the respective WCFs.

8. To encourage the General Secretary to explore maintaining and strengthening appropriate liaison with such WCFs as may be interested in building closer overall relationships, and to make maximum use of existing constitutional provisions for WCF involvement in developing WCC policies.

The Committee on the General Secretariat submitted the following further observations:

1. It seemed clear that in the years which lay ahead, relationships with WCFs would require regular attention: The Central Committee might want to review future developments at its meeting in 1981 with a view to considering what presentation should be prepared for submission to the Sixth Assembly.

2. The report recognized that relations between the WCC and regional and national councils also needed further consideration and would raise at some points questions similar to those arising from relations between the WCC and the WCFs. The Committee on the General Secretariat recommended that the full documentation on this consultation be shared with regional and associate national councils. This was *agreed*.

NOTE

1. The full text of the report of the October 1978 Consultation appears in *WCC Exchange*, No. 1, March 1979, and *LWF Report*, No. 3, December 1978, Appendix 7, pp. 73-87.